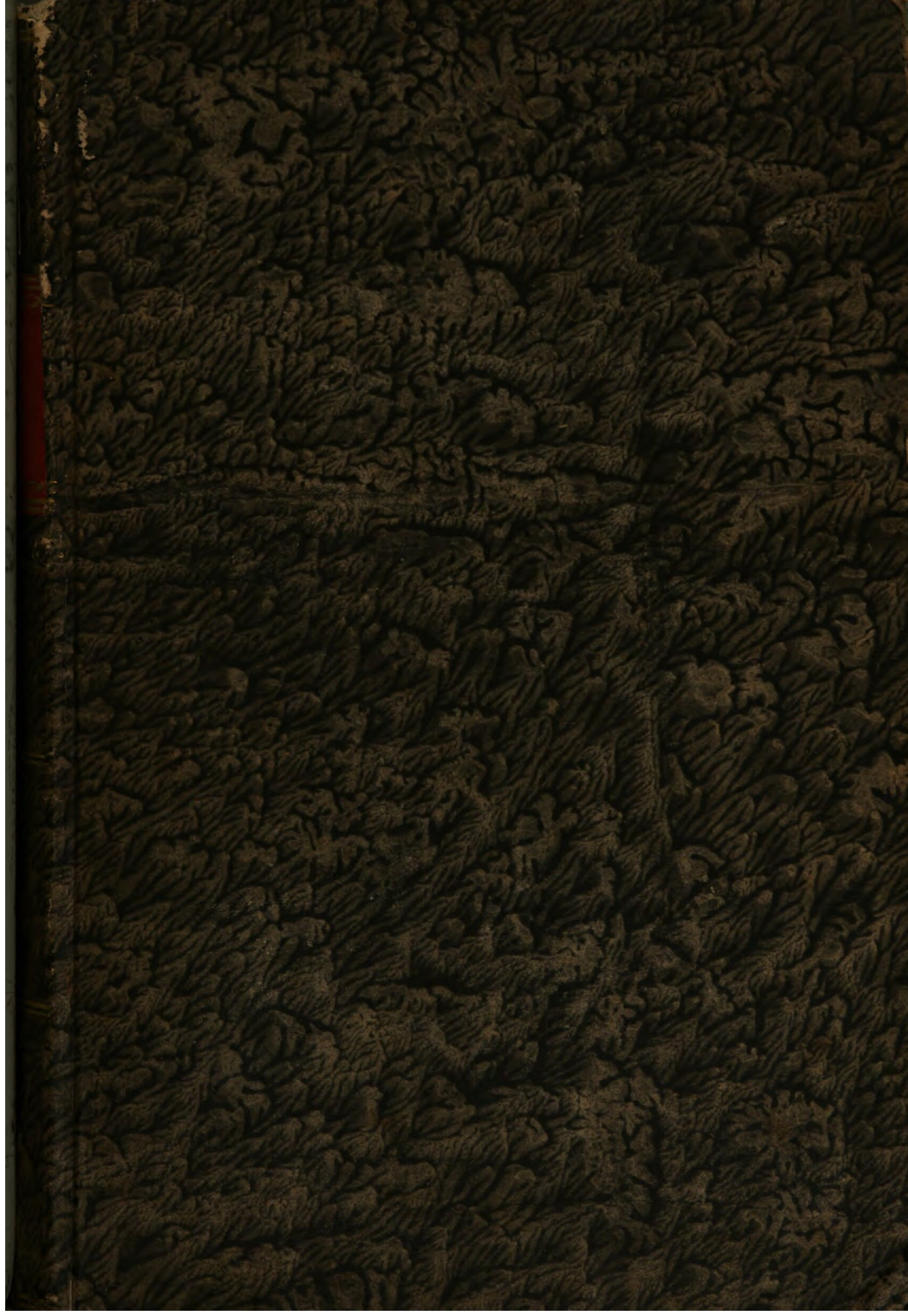




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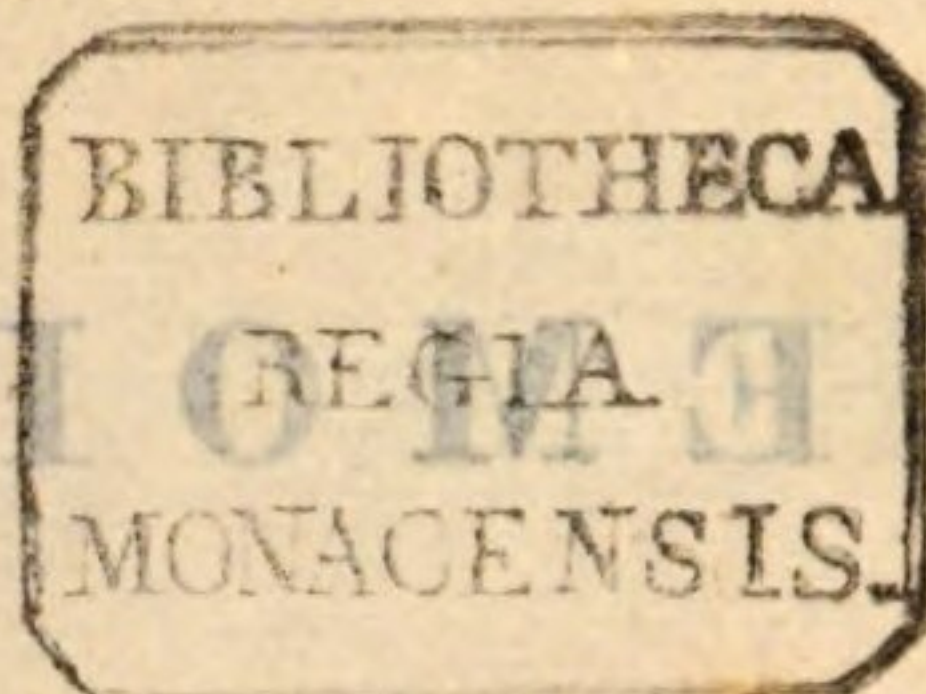
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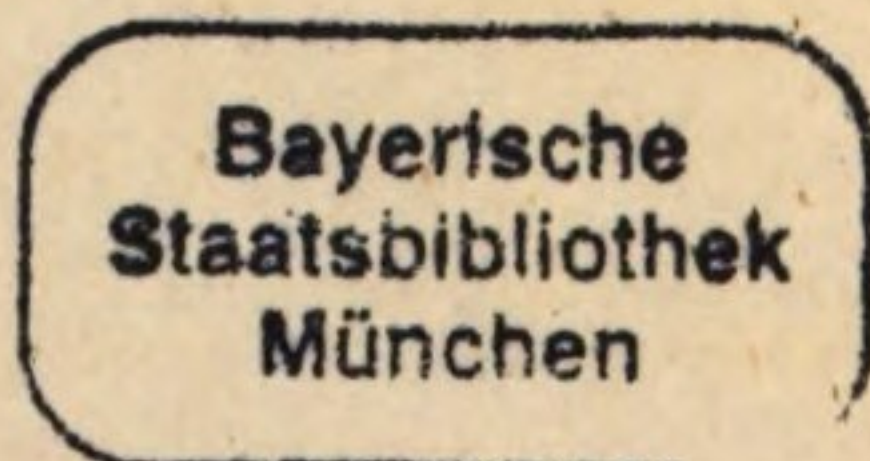


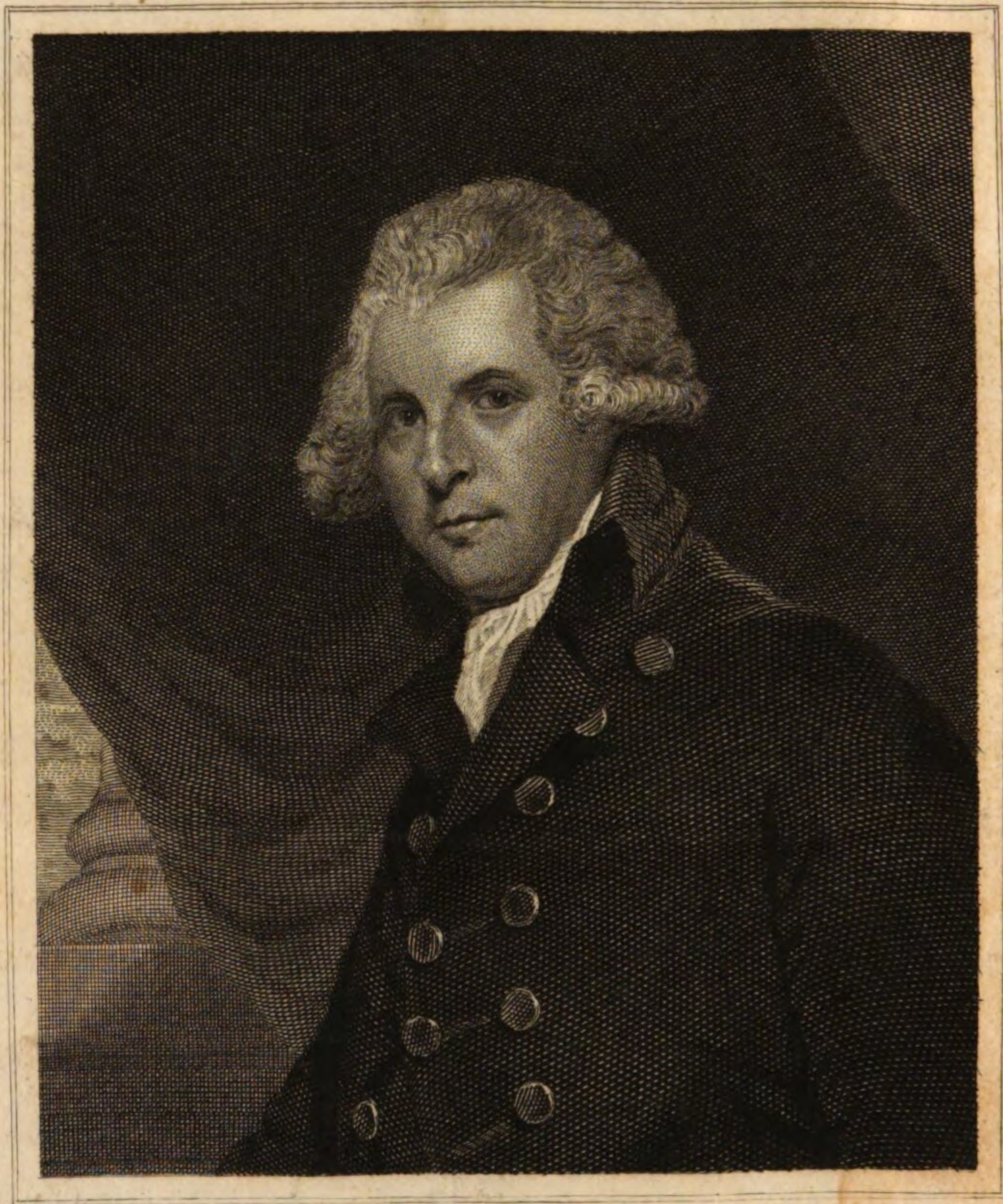
DIRECTIONS FOR PLACING THE PORTRAITS.

MR. SHERIDAN.....to face the Title Vol. I.

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MRS. SHERIDAN.....to face the Title Vol. II.





R. Sheridan

*Engraved by Robert Newton from a Painting by
Sir Joshua Reynolds.*

MEMOIRS
OF THE
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE
OF THE
RIGHT HONORABLE
R. B. SHERIDAN,
WITH
A particular Account
OF
HIS FAMILY AND CONNEXIONS.

BY
JOHN WATKINS, LL.D.

*Tanta est rerum discordia in ævo,
Et sub texta malis bona sunt, lacrymæque ; sequuntur,
Vota, nec in cunctis servat fortuna tenorem,
Usque adeò permixta fluit, nec permanet unquam,
Amisitque, fidem variando cuncta per omnes.*

MANILIUS.

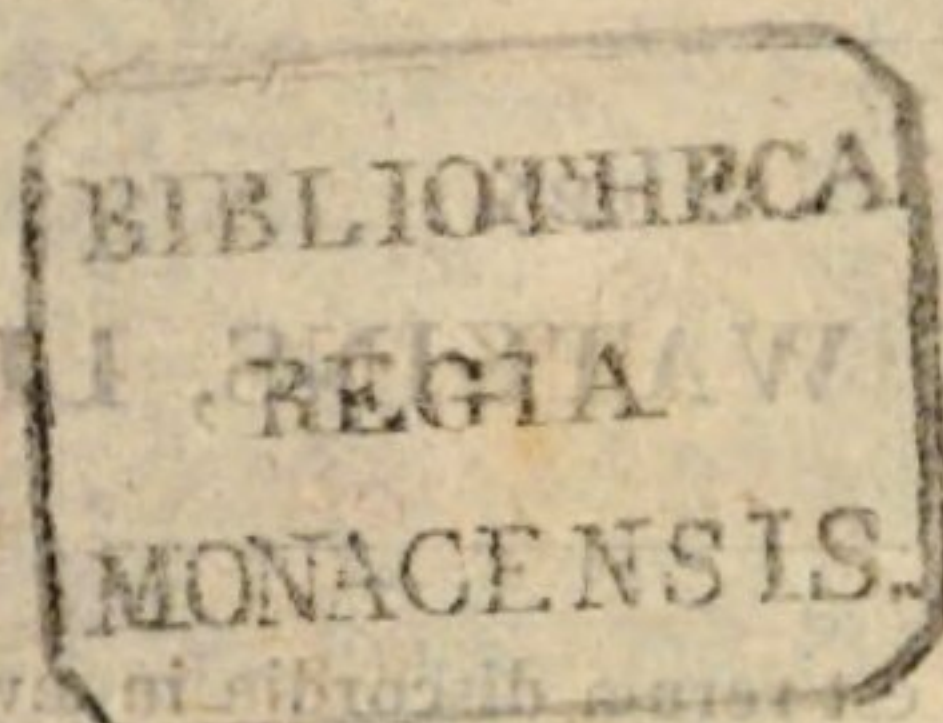
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A Particular Account
OF
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P R E F A C E.



BIOGRAPHY is of so much importance in developing the characters of public persons, and unfolding the secret springs of complicated events, that any apology for offering to the world memoirs of those who have figured with eminence in the walks of literature, or the sphere of politics, might seem to be altogether superfluous. Yet common courtesy requires some account of a writer's motives and authorities, that it may appear how far his narrative is entitled to attention on the ground of impartiality, or to confidence in the validity of what it relates.

Of the present performance it is perhaps sufficient to say, that it originated in no sinister views, or in the wish to advocate any particular interests. Superior to the influence of party, the author has been careful to represent actions as he found them, to discover the causes out of which they sprung, and to ascertain the real principles by which the agents in them were severally governed.

The reader need hardly be told that the last thirty years have produced more changes of tremendous import than any period of similar extent in the annals of Europe. It is, therefore, evident that the memoirs of individuals who have borne an active part in any of these scenes must, when properly executed, prove entertaining to the present age, and beneficial to posterity, by shewing how easily communities may be thrown into disorder, on what slender movements the fate of empires may depend, and of what flimsy materials political combinations are frequently composed.

Among the luminaries that have shed lustre upon this eventful æra, the late Mr. SHERIDAN was remarkably

conspicuous, by the splendour of his eloquence, the causticity of his wit, and the versatility of his powers. The system in which he moved displayed, for a long space, an uncommon brilliancy of genius, with a combination of various talent, but of which even now we have little more than an imperfect record and an evanescent remembrance.

While this constellation shone pre-eminent, each of its orbs had an impressive effect upon public opinion, which, in some instances, received thereby an impulse, that, under the specious plea of promoting justice, ran into the excess of oppression; and, in clamouring for indefinite rights, forgot the duties upon which all right is founded. Thus it is that the imperfections of human wisdom afford lessons of practical caution; and they who may be fortunate enough by a command of intellect to gain an ascendancy over the minds of their countrymen, are taught to use that privilege with humility, and with an indulgence to the infirmities of others:

Qui ne tuberibus propriis offendat amicum
 Postulat ignoscat verrucis illius; æquum est
 Peccatis veniam poscentem reddere rursus.

HORACE.

It remains only to say, that the sources whence these memoirs are drawn have been of a public and private nature. The former it would be needless to enumerate, as they consist of an immense number of works, all of an authoritative character, and investigated with the greatest diligence. Of the latter it can only be said, that many papers have been imparted by persons of the greatest respectability, whose names cannot be here mentioned, except the single one of the late Mr. SAMUEL WHYTE, of Dublin, at whose suggestion, and by virtue of whose communications, the history of Mr. Sheridan and his family was originally projected.

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MEMOIRS

OF

THE RIGHT HONORABLE

R. B. SHERIDAN,

&c. &c.

INTRODUCTION.

*Antiquity of the Family of Sheridan.—Memoirs of
Doctor Thomas Sheridan.—Anecdotes of Dean
Swift.*

ONE of the oldest and most acute of the French moral writers has observed, “That not only are the marks of the body transmitted from father to son, but also a resemblance of temper, complexion, and inclinations of the mind.” However bold and fanciful this position of Montaigne may appear at first sight, a particular attention to the family history of celebrated persons will furnish many striking illustrations in support of its probability.

That of the Sheridans, for instance, exhibits such a strong and remarkable succession of hereditary

talent and imprudence, of genius and extravagance, as to render a detailed account of the lineage for a century past necessary in the memoir of its last and brightest luminary.

The name, which is of very ancient standing in the sister kingdom, and conspicuous in its annals, clearly denotes an aboriginal stock, the shoots of which have spread widely, and been transplanted by the fluctuation of time, and the varieties of fortune, in so many directions, as to have lost all knowledge of their source, and every trace of their affinity. Some branches have continued firmly rooted in their natal soil, and in the profession of their ancient faith; while others, more versatile, have removed to distant provinces, intermixed with English and Scotch families, and conformed, without difficulty, to the religion established by law. Several of these obtained considerable preferment in the national church, soon after the Reformation; and in the reign of Charles the Second, Dr. William Sheridan held the united see of Kilmore and Ardagh, of which he was deprived at the Revolution, for refusing to take the oaths of allegiance to the new government. At the time when this learned and conscientious prelate presided over that diocese, of which he was a native, there lived near him two or three families of the same name, who claimed his lordship as their relation. Among these was Thomas Sheridan, a country gentleman, possessed of a small estate at

Uagheraghy, in the county of Cavan. He was a protestant, and a man of very generous sentiments, well beloved in his neighbourhood for his hospitable disposition, and particularly esteemed by the gentry around, on account of his spirit as a sportsman, and his superior skill in the management of horses and dogs. That knowledge and liberality, however, which raised him in the estimation of his neighbours, only served to impoverish his circumstances, and to embarrass him in difficulties. These were at last so great, that though he contrived to give his only son Thomas an excellent education at the school of Cavan, he found himself incapable of supporting him at the university. One thing, indeed, the father did, which marked more discretion than usually characterized his conduct, and that was the resolution he took of getting rid of his pack of hounds, upon observing that Thomas neglected the school for the dog kennel. At the age of sixteen, through the recommendation of the deprived Bishop of Kilmore, and the assistance of some friends of the family, the youth was entered a scholar of Trinity College, Dublin. Here he pursued his studies with great credit, and procured the good opinion of his superiors, by his readiness to oblige, and the friendship of his companions, by his pleasantry. Having taken his degrees, and entered into orders, he succeeded to a fellowship, but soon lost the benefit of it, by marrying before he had obtained such a

provision in the church, as was necessary for the support of a family. His wife was Elizabeth Macfadden, the only child of an Irish gentleman, of the province of Ulster. She was a woman rather plain in her person; and if the picture drawn of her by Swift be not altogether a caricature, her mind and manners were far from making an atonement for the want of external beauty. Having thus made a serious change in his condition, and that without any present advantage, Mr. Sheridan, by the advice of his friends, opened a classical seminary in Capel Street, Dublin. The house which he took for a school was called King James's Mint, because while that unfortunate monarch resided in the Irish capital, his necessities obliged him to adopt a coinage there of base metal, for the payment of his troops. Such was the reputation of Mr. Sheridan as a scholar, and so well was he respected for his good-nature and entertaining qualities, that his school quickly acquired distinction, and the number of his pupils increased from all parts of the kingdom. What served to enhance his importance, and to multiply his gains, if he could have properly improved the connexion, was the friendship which he formed early in 1715 with Dean Swift.

As this was an epoch of moment in the life of Sheridan, the account of his first acquaintance with that extraordinary genius will be proper in this place. The Dean, soon after his return to Ireland,

on the death of Queen Anne, was in extreme low spirits, occasioned by the blight of his prospects in England. In this condition, and disgusted with the country to which he was doomed, he became anxious to form some society over which he could rule without a partner near his throne, and to have an instrument upon which he could play at any time. Having heard much of Sheridan as a man of wit and humour, he desired a common friend to bring them together; which was done, and they passed the day to their mutual satisfaction. When they broke up at night, Swift, in his usual ironical way, said, "I invite all here present to dine with me next Thursday, except Mr. Sheridan," giving, at the same time, a look which expressed that the invitation was made on his account. From this time the acquaintance ripened into a complete friendship: and as Sheridan was intimate with the most ingenious persons in Dublin, he introduced them to the Dean, who thus, by the enjoyment of pleasant society, got rid of much of his dejection. But, it is said, that he owed other obligations to Sheridan; for being desirous of reviving the knowledge of Greek and Latin, which he had neglected in the hurry of politics and the bustle of the world, he invited his new associate, the schoolmaster, to pass his vacations with him at the Deanry, where an apartment was fitted up for him, and which ever after went by his name. Thus assisted, Swift

went through a complete course of the classics, which gave him an opportunity of seeing the profound learning of the Doctor, whom he pronounced the best scholar in Europe. This, however, it should be observed is the relation of the Doctor's son, and though part of it is probably correct, it is grossly overcharged in some points, and out of all probability in others. That Swift might wish to have a literary friend in whose confidence he could rely, with whom to read ancient authors, is very likely; but that he should stand in need of so much help as to be guided through an entire course of the classics, merely to become qualified to bear a part in conversation with the fellows of the College of Dublin, is ridiculous, when we consider the constellation of learning and genius among whom he had been accustomed regularly to move in England. What follows in the narrative of the life of Swift is unobjectionable in itself, and truly expressive of the writer's own goodness of heart, and of his father's merits.

“As Sheridan,” says he, “was the most open undisguised man in the world, it did not require much time or penetration to see into his whole character, in which Swift found many things to admire, many things to love, and little to offend. He had the strictest regard to truth, and the highest sense of honour; incapable of dissimulation in the smallest degree, generous to a fault, and charitable in the extreme; of a proud, independent spirit,

which would not suffer him to crouch to the great ones of the world for any favour, nor to put on even the appearance of flattery. He had a heart formed for friendship, in which Swift had the first place. It was impossible not to esteem a man possessed of qualities so congenial with his own; but his affection was engaged by those of a less exalted kind, and more pleasing in the general intercourse of life. Sheridan had a lively fancy, and a surprising quickness of invention. He had such a perpetual flow of spirits, such a ready wit, and variety of humour, that I have often heard his acquaintance say, it was impossible for the most splenetic man not to be cheerful in his company. Imagine what a treasure this must be to Swift, in that gloomy state of mind into which the disappointment of all his views, upon the queen's death, had thrown him; and in which he continued so many years. Despair of doing any good had turned his thoughts wholly from public affairs, which before had engrossed so much of his time; and he was not in a disposition to set about any work that would require much thought, or labour of the brain; he therefore gave himself wholly up to the *bagatelle*, and to writing nothing but *jeux d'esprit*, in which no one was better qualified to keep up the ball than Sheridan.

“ For one whole year it was agreed that they should write to each other in verse every day, and were to be upon honour that they would take

up no more than five minutes in composing each letter. Numbers of riddles, Anglo-Latin letters, and other whims of fancy, were produced in the same way.

“ With all these good qualities, Swift saw some weaknesses and infirmities in his friend, which he in vain endeavoured to cure. However skilled he might be in books, he was a perfect child as to the knowledge of the world. Being wholly void of artifice and design himself, he never suspected any in others; and thus became the dupe of all artful men with whom he had any connexion. As he knew not how to set a true value on money, he had no regard to economy; and his purse was always open to the indigent, without considering whether he could afford it or not. In conversation, his fancy was not always under the direction of discretion; and he frequently gave offence by sudden sallies, without intending it. Swift acted the part of a true friend on these occasions, and was not sparing of his admonitions and advice, as opportunities offered: but he found the Doctor too opinionated to be guided by the judgment of others, though his own was too weak to restrain his natural propensities. In this case the best service to be done was to increase his income in proportion to the largeness of his spirit, as his spirit was not to be confined within the bounds of his income. With this view, Swift was indefatigable in his endeavours to promote the flourishing state

of his school. He recommended him to all as the ablest master of the age ; and published a copy of Latin verses in his praise as such ; he descended even at times to act as his usher ; and frequently attended at school to hear a class. When the doctor was ill, or absent in the country, he supplied his place ; and was always one of the examiners at the public quarterly examinations. Such attention paid by one of Swift's high character could not fail of raising the reputation of the school ; and accordingly it increased so rapidly, that in a few years the number of scholars far exceeded that of any other seminary ever known in that kingdom."

While he was enjoying the substantial benefits of the Dean's friendship, which were intended to place him ultimately in a state of complete independence, he squandered the whole return of his school, amounting to one thousand pounds a-year, in a manner equally unbecoming his profession, and the duty which he owed to his family. He kept an open table, which was frequented by all the jovial companions of Dublin, without much regard to their character, or the decency of their conversation. The Dean, alarmed and vexed at this thoughtless conduct, at length formed a happy plan of extricating his friend from the vortex of folly and ruin ; but here also he had the mortification of finding his good intentions thwarted at the very moment when that which he had considered as the main obstacle was removed. Hearing that

the endowed grammar school of Armagh, then worth four hundred a-year, was vacant, he applied without delay to the Primate Lindsay for the presentation in behalf of Sheridan, which was readily granted. Swift, overjoyed at this, hastened immediately to communicate the glad tidings to the Doctor, who, instead of taking it as he ought, and accepting it with thankful acknowledgments, said that he must consult his friends. "Your friends!" cried the indignant Dean, who knew that the persons so designated were a set of cormorants—"you are a blockhead, and ever will be, as to the world: because they are pleased with your company, and gratify themselves in passing many happy hours with you in social mirth, therefore you suppose them to be your friends. Believe me, there is little true friendship in the world; and it is not impossible but the very men who now embrace you, may hereafter turn out to be your inveterate enemies. Take my advice: consult none of them; but accept, without hesitation, an offer which will secure you a handsome income for life, independent of casualties. Besides, your school will probably flourish as much there as here; for the high reputation you have gained in Dublin will follow you to the north, and secure to you all the boys of that most populous and affluent part of the kingdom."

This was sound advice, and a prophetic warning; but the Doctor was insensible to both. He

preferred the counsel of his friends, as he called them, who strongly dissuaded him from leaving Dublin : and a few years afterwards, these same persons set up another school in opposition to him, which they supported with their whole interest.

But though the Dean had reason enough to be displeased at the conduct of a man whose interests and that of his family he had so materially served by obtaining for him this appointment, he did not abate in his kindness, or relax in his efforts, to render him independent. Unfortunately, however, the malignant star which prevailed over the fate of Sheridan blasted every thing that was done to do him service. Sometime after this, Lord Carteret, one of the most amiable and accomplished noblemen of his age, was nominated Viceroy of Ireland ; and the Dean, being intimately acquainted with his lordship, contrived to bring him into the company of Dr. Sheridan. The consequence was, that the Lord Lieutenant was highly pleased with the pleasantries of his discourse, and the extent of his learning. At his desire, the scholars of the Doctor performed one of the plays of Sophocles, and his lordship condescended to be present at the exhibition. Sheridan soon felt the influence of court favour, being appointed one of the royal chaplains, and presented to a living in the diocese of Cork. On going down to be inducted, he was requested by Archdeacon Russell of Cork to supply his place in the pulpit on the following Sunday. The

Doctor, who was a very absent man, had forgotten his engagement, and was sitting quietly at his lodging, when a message from the parish clerk, who saw no preacher arrive after the service had begun, roused him from his reverie. He dressed himself with as much speed as he could, and having but two sermons with him, took up the first that came to hand, without looking at it. That day happened to be the first of August, which, being the anniversary of the death of Queen Anne, and of the accesssion of George the First, was observed with different feelings by the violent Tories and the zealous Whigs. But this circumstance did not once occur to the Doctor, who very innocently gave out the remarkable text of "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." The instant these words were pronounced, the quick ears of the more intelligent part of the congregation began to be fixed in attention, expecting, of course, what was by no means an uncommon thing in those times, a discourse well seasoned with political allusions. Though in this they experienced a disappointment, for the sermon was a plain, practical disquisition upon the ordinary duty of husbanding time, and of submitting to the course of providence; there were not wanting some quick-scented persons who fancied that the preacher had a seditious object in view by selecting so appropriate a passage. One of the hearers thinking, perhaps, that this was a good opportunity to re-

commend himself at the castle, took post for Dublin, where he set forth the transgression of the Doctor in such colours, that his friends began to be seriously alarmed; and Swift, in one of his letters, says, "Such a clamour was raised by the zeal of one man, of no large dimensions either of body or mind, that we in Dublin could apprehend no less than an invasion by the Pretender, who must be landed in the south."

The incident is a striking proof of the virulent party-spirit of the times, and of the extravagant lengths to which it carried men in the manifestation of their loyalty. But if the intemperance of the people was excessive, the jealousy of the government was impolitic and weak in the extreme. Of this, a more glaring instance could hardly have been shewn than the act of striking out Dr. Sheridan's name from the list of chaplains, and prohibiting his appearance at the castle. It was in vain for the poor unlucky preacher to allege in his defence that the sermon was not a new one, and that it contained nothing of an inflammatory nature: he could neither obtain a hearing, nor was his discourse suffered to be examined, but all was taken upon trust, because he was known to be a Tory, and consequently was suspected to be a Jacobite. Swift, however, remained his friend in this unforeseen calamity, though it was not in his nature to forbear a joke upon the blunder that had been committed. On this occasion he said, al-

luding to Sheridan's skill as a sportsman, that he was so good a marksman as to kill his preferment by a single text. In one of his letters, however, the Dean says, "It is, indeed, against common sense to think that you should choose such a time, when you had received a favour from the lord lieutenant, and had reason to expect more, to discover your disloyalty in the pulpit. But what will that avail? It is safer for a man's interest to blaspheme God, than to be a party out of power, or even to be thought so; and since the last was the case, how could you imagine that all mouths would not be open when you were received, and in some manner preferred by government, although in a poor way. I tell you there is hardly a Whig in Ireland who would allow a potatoe and butter-milk to a reputed Tory."

What aggravated the misfortune was the ridicule that attended it, since the most intimate of the Doctor's associates could not avoid laughing at the blunder which he had committed, while they lamented its consequences, and resented the injustice with which he had been treated. Still he had no great reason to complain; and though he was obliged to endure undeserved obloquy on one hand, and the satirical condolence of his friends on the other, he had the satisfaction of experiencing an uncommon act of generosity from the archdeacon, who had been the innocent cause of the mischief. That worthy man, who entertained

a thorough respect for Sheridan, and pitied his numerous family, went immediately to Dublin, where by a deed of gift he made over to him the valuable manor of Drumlane, in the county of Cavan, which at that time produced a clear rent of two hundred and fifty pounds a-year.

It might reasonably have been expected that this very rare instance of liberality would have operated upon the mind of the Doctor in such a way as to lead him into an economical line of conduct, for the advantage of those who were professedly the objects of the benevolence of the donor. Instead of this, neither the mortification he had suffered, nor the kindness which had been shewn him under it, could cure his levity, or restrain his prodigality. His income was now above twelve hundred a-year, and yet that large sum was not sufficient to supply his extravagance; of which some idea may be formed from the slight account given by his son, who says, that "he was the greatest dupe in the world, and a constant prey to all the indigent of his acquaintance, as well as those who were recommended to him by others. Not content with receiving several into his school, whom he taught without pay, he had always two or three whom he lodged and boarded in his house gratis; nay, some he maintained in cloaths, and every other necessary, and afterwards entered and supported them in the college, at his own charge, as if they had been his sons. To his

daughters he gave the genteelest education, and drest them in the most fashionable style. As he was an adept in music, both in the scientific and practical part, he had frequent private concerts at his house, at no small cost; and the expences of his table were certainly not diminished by his increase of fortune."

The instances, indeed, of his utter want of common sense, in the ordinary concerns of life, would almost stagger belief, if they did not come attested by authority not to be questioned. Besides the reluctant evidence of the son, we have the testimony of Swift, who drew a very faithful picture of his friend, under the title of "The History of the Second Solomon," in which poor Sheridan appears to about the same advantage as many of the characters in Erasmus's "Praise of Folly." Besides his house in Dublin, the Doctor took another at Rathfarnham, upon a lease of nine hundred and ninety-nine years, at twelve pounds per annum, when, according to Swift, it was hardly worth forty shillings. After laying out more money in repairs than the house was worth, the Doctor conceived a dislike to his bargain, abandoned the place, and though he was obliged to pay the rent, he took no measures to reimburse himself by procuring a tenant. He had also another estate held by lease, which he forgot to renew from time to time, was obliged to pay fines according to the agreement, and at length

was sued for dilapidations. Another act of his folly was that of holding Quilca in his own hands, and expending large sums in building and planting upon it, instead of letting it out for the benefit of his family. In doing this, however, he gratified his own vanity, and indulged his friend the Dean, who made Quilca his retreat when he wanted to withdraw from observation, and to put into execution any of his literary projects. Here he wrote *Gulliver's Travels*, the secret of which he imparted to no one but Sheridan; and it is at least honourable to the latter, that he preserved in silence what was entrusted to him in confidence. This was not the only instance in which Swift placed an important trust in the fidelity of Sheridan, who conducted the publication of the *Drapier's Letters*, and corrected the manuscripts before they went to the press. Yet while Swift made use of his friend's country house, and employed him in many services of importance, he could not avoid exercising his splenetic humour, and caustic wit, at the expense of his host, and amanuensis. During his residence at Quilca, he ordered a canal to be dug, trees to be planted, and an enclosure to be made, in the absence of the owner, merely to excite his surprize at the improvements; and when the Doctor affected to treat the whole with indifference, he cursed his stupidity, and abused him for want of taste. But Sheridan shortly after was even with the Dean; for when he was on a visit at some distance, several labourers were set

to form an island in the middle of the lake, after which, the spot was covered with green sod, and planted with osiers, to the great astonishment of Swift, who thought at first that the water had sunk so low as to lay the ground bare in that part. To this the Doctor replied with a sneer, "It must have greatly sunk indeed, to discover the tops of those osiers," on which the Dean perceived that a trick had been played upon him, and he had the candour to confess that the alterations surpassed his own in beauty and ingenuity.

Sheridan was exceedingly proud of his paternal mansion, and of the fancied state of improvement into which he had brought the ground around it by his skill in farming, and judgment in ornamental gardening.

The Dean, who hated prodigality and ostentation, was resolved to mortify the vanity of Sheridan on this point, and accordingly wrote the following ludicrous description of Quilca:

Let me thy properties explain :
A rotten cabin, dropping rain,
Chimneys with scorn rejecting smoke ;
Stools, tables, chairs, and bedsteads broke,
Here elements have lost their uses,
Air ripens not, nor earth produces.
In vain we make poor Shelah toil :
Fire will not roast, nor water boil.
Through all the valleys, hills, and plains,
The goddess WANT in triumph reigns ;
And her chief officers of state,
SLOTH, DIRT, and THEFT around her wait.

This poetical picture the author kept snug in his pocket-book, waiting for a proper opportunity to bring it forward in such a way as should excite a laugh against the place and its owner. Not long afterwards, the Dean being in company with the Bishop of Meath and some other persons, among whom was Sheridan, the prelate happened to say that he was without a house, as his palace was then undergoing a repair. Upon this, Swift offered his parsonage of Laracor for the use of the Bishop; and Sheridan, in his usual manner, began to expatiate upon the superior advantages and beauties of Quilca, which in truth was at that very time the reverse of what he represented. The Dean being no longer able to endure the childish folly of his friend, exclaimed, "My Lord, do you hear that vapouring scab? I will shew you an exact picture of the place which he has painted in such fine colours." He then produced his verses, which occasioned laughter enough against the Doctor, who sat crest fallen; but not without meditating a severe retaliation.

Accordingly, he contrived by some means to absent himself for a short space; which he employed in writing a humorous inventory of the household goods at Laracor. Having finished his piece, he folded it up, and gave it, with a shilling, to a beggar, who was to present it as a petition to the Bishop. While his lordship was reading

it, the Dean, who had an utter dislike to all mendicants, was inveighing loudly against the practice of giving encouragement to such sturdy vagrants. When the Bishop had finished the perusal of the paper, he observed, "Indeed, Mr. Dean, if what is here stated be true, the man is not so much to blame as yourself;" on saying which, he handed him the pretended petition, which contained "A true and faithful Inventory of the goods belonging to Dr. Swift, Vicar of Laracor, upon his offering to lend his house to the Bishop of Meath, until his own is built."

An oaken, broken, elbow chair ;
A caudle cup, without an ear ;
A batter'd, shatter'd, ash-bedstead ;
A box of deal without a lid ;
A pair of tongs, but out of joint ;
A back sword poker without point ;
A pot that's crack'd across, around,
With an old knotted garter bound ;
An iron lock without a key ;
A wig, with hanging, quite grown grey ;
A curtain worn to half a stripe ;
A pair of bellows, without pipe ;
A dish which might good meat afford once ;
An Ovid, and an old Concordance ;
A bottle bottom, wooden platter ;
One is for meal, one for water ;
There likewise is a copper skillet ;
Which runs as fast out as you fill it ;
A candlestick, snuff-dish, and save-all ;
And thus his household goods you have all.

These to your Lordship, as a friend,
Till you have built, I freely lend ;
They'll serve your Lordship for a shift,
Why not, as well as Doctor Swift ?

Many whimsical adventures were encountered by the Dean and the Doctor when they resided in the country, and some of them are too characteristic of the parties to be omitted in this narrative. One day, at Quilca, the Dean received intelligence that there was to be a beggar's wedding in the neighbourhood; which being a scene exactly suited to his taste, he proposed that Sheridan should go thither as a blind fiddler, with a bandage over his eyes, and he would attend him as his guide. Thus accoutred, they reached the place, and were received with welcome shouts by the whole crew, who had plenty of meat and drink, and plied the fiddler and his man with more than was agreeable to them. Never was a more joyous wedding seen. They sung, they danced, told their stories, and cracked jokes in a vein of humour more entertaining to the two guests than probably could have been found at any other meeting on a similar occasion; and when the musician and his guide were about to depart, the company rewarded them very handsomely. The next day the Dean and the Doctor walked out in their usual dress, and found their companions of the preceding evening, scattered about in different parts of the road, and the neighbouring village,

all begging charity in doleful strains, and telling dismal stories of their misery. Among these, were some upon crutches, who had danced very nimbly at the wedding; others stone blind, who were perfectly clear sighted at the feast. The Doctor distributed among them the money which he had received as his pay; but the Dean, who mortally hated all vagrants, rated them soundly; told them in what manner he had been present at their entertainment, and assured them that if they did not immediately apply to honest labour, he would have them taken up and committed to jail; upon hearing which, the lame recovered their legs, and the blind opened their eyes so effectually as to make a very precipitate retreat in all directions.

Another story still more extraordinary of these two friends has been related by the late Mr. Theophilus Swift, who had it from unquestionable authority.

The Dean was once on a visit to the Ludlow family, who resided at Ardsalla, in the county of Meath; at which time were also present, among others, Dr. Daniel Jackson, and his brother, the two Grattans, the Rev. Mr. Stopford, afterwards bishop, and Dr. Sheridan. One night, when the family were retired to rest, Sheridan had occasion to go into the yard; but not being able to find the outer door, or the same being locked, he returned to his room, and from necessity was

compelled to make a yard of his own chamber. The Dean, whose observation nothing could escape, came to the knowledge of the fact, with which he taxed Sheridan roundly, and that too in the coarsest language possible. The other denied the charge in a very vehement manner; but Swift, who knew that it was true, having privately bribed the chambermaid to discover the matter, persisted in his accusation; and as the assizes were at hand, he determined to try Sheridan according to law. For this purpose the neighbours were summoned; the better sort as grand jurors, the inferior, as a petty jury, to sit in judgment on this delicate occasion. A tribunal was accordingly erected, and all things prepared in due and regular form. A plain kitchen table, turned with its top downward, served for a dock, into which Sheridan was placed bareheaded, while Swift mounted the seat of justice with his own wig, bushed out into a full bottom, inverted on his head: a servant maid's scarlet cloak was flung over his shoulders, and the parson's band was converted into that of a judge. The grand jury, having been sworn on a playbook, found a true bill against the culprit; after which, the petty jury were impannelled, and sworn in their turn. The prisoner was then put on his trial, and the crier commanded silence, while the lawyers ranged themselves on each side. The utmost gravity and decorum prevailed even amidst all this mockery;

and the only smile that passed arose from the ludicrous circumstance of Mr. Stopford, who being feed for the crown, declared he could not do his duty as a true lawyer, unless he should be feed on both sides. A second fee was therefore given him in open court on behalf of the prisoner ; the whole amounting to eighteen shillings. It is said that he conducted himself with wonderful humour through the whole of the trial. The Jacksons and Grattans had likewise their respective stations in the cause. Most of the servants were examined, and the utensil was produced in open court. The chambermaid was examined and cross-examined very closely ; and even the mistress of the house was obliged to make her appearance, whose testimony closed the scene ; after which, Swift summed up the evidence in great form, leaving the whole of the case to the jury, who returned a verdict of guilty. The Dean then, with all solemnity, pronounced sentence of death on the trembling Sheridan, awfully concluding in the usual form, “ The Lord have mercy on your soul ! ” A rope was now produced ; on seeing which, Sheridan, with well-acted fear, jumped out of the dock, ran up stairs, and the whole court at his heels. But the Doctor gained his room, the door of which he locked, and then began to barricado it with all the furniture that could be moved. Here, for two hours, he remained in a state of siege ; but at length capi-

tulated on an assurance that he should not be hanged.

Ridiculous as all this may appear, what followed was still more so, for the judges it is said were so exasperated at the affront put upon them by the Dean, as to send an account of the affair to the Lord Lieutenant, who wisely laughed at it as a joke. But Swift was not the only one to exercise his wit at the expense of Sheridan's weakness; as the following story will shew.

It was customary with the Doctor to have a Greek play acted by his head class just before they entered the University; and accordingly, in the year 1720, having fixed upon Hippolytus, he wrote a prologue in English, to be spoken by Master Putland, one of the youngest children he had in his school. The prologue was very neat, but puerile, and quite adapted to the infantile appearance of the speaker, who was taught his part, and rehearsed it in due form. However, it unfortunately happened that Dr. King, Archbishop of Dublin, had promised Sheridan that he would go and see his lads perform the tragedy: upon which Dr. Helsham, the physician, wrote another prologue, wherein he laughed egregiously at that of Sheridan, and privately instructed Master Putland how to speak it to advantage, exacting at the same time a promise that no consideration should make him repeat that prologue which he had previously learnt. When the play

was to be acted, the Archbishop attended according to his promise, and young Putland began Helsham's prologue, which he went through to the amazement and chagrin of Sheridan, who was so much exasperated, that he would have put a stop to the performance, had it not been out of respect to the Archbishop, who was indeed highly complimented in Helsham's piece. When the play was over, the Archbishop was very desirous of hearing Sheridan's prologue, but all the intreaties of his grace, the commands of the child's father, and of Sheridan, could not prevail with Master Putland to repeat it; having, he said, faithfully promised that he would not upon any account whatever, and therefore insisted that he would keep his word. It was to this circumstance that Swift, in a vein of whim and merriment, alluded in his "Invitation to Dr. Sheridan, to spend the August vacation at Gallstown, the seat of George Rochfort, Esq., in these lines:

" Oh! I forgot too—I believe there may be one more, I mean
 that great fat joker, *friend Helsham*, he
 That wrote the prologue, and if you stay with him, depend on't
 in the end *he'll sham ye*."

It has been said by Lord Orrery and others, that " Swift fastened upon Sheridan as a prey with which to regale himself whenever his appetite should prompt him." This assertion gave mighty offence to the Doctor's son, who very

gravely laboured to prove that the connexion was formed upon principles of friendship and admiration on both sides ; but how truly, the following lines, written by the Dean, will sufficiently make appear.

Tom was a little merry grig,
Fiddled and danc'd to his own jig ;
Good-natur'd, but a little silly ;
Irresolute and shally-shilly.
What he should do he could not guess,
They mov'd him like a man at chess.
SWIFT told him once that he had wit ;
SWIFT was in jest, poor Tom was bit ;
Thought himself son of second Phœbus,
For ballad, pun, lampoon, and rebus.
He took a draught of Helicon,
But swallow'd so much water down,
He got a dropsy ; now they say 'tis
Turn'd to poetic diabetes ;
And all the liquor he has past,
Is without spirit, salt, or taste.
But since it past, Tom thought it wit,
And therefore writ, and writ, and writ.
He writ the Wonder of all Wonders ;
He writ the Blunder of all Blunders ;
He writ a merry farce for Poppet,
Taught actors how to squeak, and hop it :
A Treatise on the Wooden Man *,
A Ballad on the Nose of Dan †,

* The sign of a wooden man in Essex Street, Dublin.

† Daniel Jackson, who was remarkable for a huge proboscis.

The Art of making April Fools,
 And Four-and-Thirty Punning Rules*.
 The learned say, that Tom went snacks
 With Philomaths for Almanacks,
 Though they divided are; and some say
 He writ for Whaley, some for Compsay †.
 Hundreds there are who will make oath
 He wrote alternately for both:
 For though they made the calculations,
 Tom writ the monthly observations.
 Such were his writings; but his chatter
 Was one continued clitter-clatter.
 SWIFT slit his tongue, and made him talk,
 Cry "Cup of sack, and walk, knaves, walk;"
 And fitted little prating Poll
 For wiry cage in common hall:
 Made him expert at quibble jargon,
 And quaint at selling of a bargain.
 Poll he could talk in different linguos,
 But he could never learn distinguos.
 SWIFT tried again, and angry threat
 Into a spaniel turn'd his parrot:
 Made him to walk on the hind legs,
 And now he dances, fawns, and begs;
 Then cuts a caper o'er a stick,
 Lies close, will whine, and creep and lick.

* Dr. Sheridan wrote an Essay, entitled "Ars Pun-ica, sive Flos Linguarum, in seventy-nine Rules, for the Improvement of Conversation, and the Help of the Memory. By the Labour and Industry of Thomas Pun-sibi." In this trifling piece on the art of punning, he was assisted by Dean Swift, and Dr. Delany.

† Two publishers of Almanacks in Dublin.

SWIFT puts a bit upon his snout,
Poor Tom he dares not look about :
But soon as Swift once gives the word,
He snaps it up though 'twere a ****.

But though the Dean took a great delight in sporting with the foibles of Sheridan, he could not do without him ; and even in the most serious concerns of his life, he consulted him in preference to other friends ; and the Doctor, on his part, never failed to discharge the trust reposed in him with zeal and affection. Thus when Vanessa, or Miss Vanhomrigh died, and in a fit of resentment against Swift for his duplicity in paying her the attentions of a lover when he was secretly married to Stella, bequeathed her whole property from him, with injunctions to her executors to publish all the letters that had passed between her and the Dean, the latter, being alarmed, and feeling the injury that must in consequence ensue to his reputation, engaged Sheridan to put a stop to the appearance of the correspondence, in which he succeeded, though he could not prevent the Poem of Cadenus and Vanessa from getting abroad into the world, in which piece the connexion between these remarkable persons was delineated in glowing terms.

The conduct of Sheridan, with regard to the unfortunate Stella, was still more honourable to the sensibility of his heart, and formed a striking contrast to the callous brutality of the Dean.

That excellent and truly amiable woman had been married many years to Swift; and though he had no reason to be ashamed of the relation, such was the unaccountable perversity of his mind, that nothing could ever induce him to acknowledge her publicly as his wife. Mrs. Johnson, for that was her real name, and which she of course retained, under the very peculiar circumstances of the case, continued for a long time in patient expectation of having justice done to her character, till hope gave way, and her constitution sunk under the disappointment. Silently she endured the anguish of her soul; but at last the symptoms of approaching dissolution becoming too evident to be mistaken, she sent for Dr. Sheridan, and opened to him the distress under which she had so long laboured, without complaint, and beseeching his influence with the Dean to seal her peace, by promising to own her as his wife, when she should be no more. The Dean was persuaded to visit her dying bed; but when she earnestly conjured him to make that declaration which was wanting to yield comfort in her last moments, instead of saying one word by way of excuse, or consolation, he turned upon his heel, and never saw her afterwards. Yet this unfeeling man has been represented by a succession of writers as possessed of a humane and generous disposition, and of sentiments so exalted, as to be guided only by truth, even whether he thereby sacrificed his interest with the great, or

his popularity with the multitude. But the barbarity of Swift in this instance proved beyond all doubt that he had no other principle of morality than what was dictated by expedience; and that all his benevolence was either affectation to gain credit, or a compromise to satisfy conscience, when its recollections became troublesome to his repose.

When the dying Stella recovered energy enough to feel indignant at the cruelty which she had experienced, her first directions were about the disposal of her property, judiciously resolving that he who could be guilty of such inhumanity, from no motive but that of pride and selfishness, should never be benefited by any part of her fortune. At her desire, Dr. Sheridan sent for a lawyer, to whom she dictated the terms of her will, bequeathing the bulk of her estate to charitable purposes; but when she mentioned a handsome legacy to the Doctor, as one of her executors, he interposed, and persevered in his resolution not to receive any bequest, even in the way of remembrance, saying “that he should think he defrauded the charity if he accepted any part of it.” In this refusal of a donation from a friend who esteemed him, who knew the embarrassed state of his circumstances, and who had the absolute right of disposing of her property in any manner that she pleased, we see more to excite surprise than commendation, more that indicated a contempt of wealth than a regard

to prudence. Had Sheridan declined the generous offer in favour of poor relations, or faithful servants, who might possibly be injured by this legacy, he would have been entitled to praise; but to reject the gift of an esteemed acquaintance, under a romantic plea of charity, was an act of folly and injustice, because it was to the detriment of his creditors, and the wrong of his children. That the school of Sheridan was at this time in a declining state could be no matter of wonder, considering his utter disregard of economy, and the indifferent example which he set in his own manners, and in the choice of his company. Extensive learning and good-nature could scarcely compensate for the want of decorum in his behaviour, and of regularity in his household. It was therefore perfectly natural for those who had some concern about the morals of their children, to be afraid of entrusting them to a master who was the more likely to prove hurtful in proportion as the suavity of his temper, and the sportive pleasantry of his conversation, furnished an apology for his errors. Accordingly, the number of his boarders lessened, and his difficulties multiplied, because, what was obvious to every eye but his own made no impression on his mind, nor produced any alteration in his conduct. In consequence of the accumulation of his debts, he mortgaged his lands, but without retrenching his expenses: next, he exchanged his living near Cork for that of Dun-

boyne, in the vicinity of Dublin, but which was little more than half the value of the former. Thus did this infatuated man go on from bad to worse, till his affairs compelled him to relinquish his school, and to remove into the country. He now committed another act of imprudence, in giving up his living for the Free Grammar School at Cavan; though in so doing he abridged his income, as the endowment of the school was considerably less than the value of Dunboyne. Still he might have lived comfortably enough at Cavan upon eighty pounds a-year, as the country was cheap, and the people were liberal; but unfortunately, habits of extravagance are not cured by change of place, nor is prudence always acquired in the school of misfortune.

Such was the influence which Sheridan had obtained over Swift, or rather so necessary was he to the enjoyment of the Dean, that the latter could not be easy in the separation, but soon after followed him to his new residence, an instance of attachment which indicated imbecility of mind rather than the strength of affection. The genius of Swift was now in the wane, and the natural moroseness of his disposition rendered him uneasy alone, and peevish in company. The light and accommodating temper of Sheridan afforded a momentary relief to this gloomy and perturbed spirit, without allaying his asperity, or curing the malady with which he was tormented. It is little

to the credit of Swift, that while he considered this friend "as his right arm," he should have suffered him to fall into a state of extreme distress, without doing any thing for his substantial benefit and that of his family. We are told, indeed, by Theophilus Swift, that once when Sheridan was very ill, the Dean allowed him a guinea a-week, which was paid him in small coin, for ready change; but the same gentleman has spoiled the story by saying that his relation became outrageous at the ingratitude of the Doctor in not acknowledging the obligation, which drew from him a witty excuse, that for a time satisfied Swift, and induced him to continue his pitiful stipend. On the same authority, we learn that the Doctor borrowed twenty pounds of the Dean, to be paid within a short period, at the expiration of which Swift became so violent, that Mrs. Whitway, who directed his domestic concerns, lent Sheridan the money to appease him; but that in less than an hour, after a wrangling altercation, the loan was renewed, with the addition of a similar sum. All that these stories prove, is the degradation which necessarily follows prodigality on the one hand, and the oppressive spirit of covetousness on the other. This contrast between the Dean and his friend in the decline of life is easy of solution; for the whole tenour of their respective histories shews that the Doctor, with all his foibles, his absence of mind, and total want of prudence, had

a good heart, that unfortunately stood in need of a sound judgment; while Swift, who possessed great acuteness of understanding, with a large stock of practical knowledge, had no feeling of which self was not the regulating principle. As age advanced, the infirmities of the one increased, because he had no perception of his folly; and the misanthropy of the other rendered him a miser and a tyrant when he could no longer be amused by external objects.

Dr. Sheridan continued at Cavan only two years, and then sold his school for the sum of four hundred pounds, with which he returned to Dublin, and paid off some of his creditors. As he resided at the Deanry, he had many opportunities of witnessing the progress of a sordid spirit in his friend, which, reminding him of an engagement that had formerly been made between them, he now resolved to fulfil his part with candour. Some years before this, the Dean one day observed, that of all vices to which old age is liable, that of avarice is the worst, and at the same time the most common; and being fearful, from an attention which he had paid to his own disposition, that he should at last contract a covetous turn, he requested Sheridan to apprise him of it whenever he saw in him any propensity to so odious a failing. The Doctor, in the simplicity of his heart, now resolved to discharge his promise, and accordingly put down in a journal a succession of glaring

instances of the Dean's parsimony, which in the course of a fortnight amounted to no small number. Furnished with these evidences, he one evening took an opportunity of bringing to Swift's recollection the conversation that had formerly taken place on this subject. The Dean, who felt great alarm at the remark, immediately said, "Yes, I remember it very well: why you do not perceive any thing of that sort in me?" To this the monitor only replied: "You shall judge for yourself: read over that paper, and see whether it is not high time that I should now perform my promise." Swift took the paper, and having read over the articles very deliberately, he leaned his head upon his hand for some time in a very thoughtful mood: after which, turning sarcastically towards Sheridan, he said, "Doctor, did you ever read *Gil Blas*?" This sudden and appropriate allusion to the well-known story of the Archbishop of Grenada, and his too-faithful secretary, plainly evinced what were the real workings in the mind of the Dean, and how much the Doctor had sunk in his favour in the very act of obeying his commands.

Instead of being affected by this proof of Sheridan's regard to his own word, and his friend's reputation, Swift became more gloomy and reserved, peevish and passionate. He apprehended that all his domestics were dishonest; that a system of peculation was carried on to his ruin; and in this morose and jealous

spirit he grudged even the ordinary expenses of his table. Unmindful of the trouble which he had at various times, and for months together, given to the family of Sheridan, he now began to treat his old companion with an unkindness bordering on brutality. The Doctor being without a house at Dublin, after giving up his residence at Cavan, went to live at the Deanry till he could be suited with a proper dwelling. At this period he was attacked by a very severe illness, which confined him to his room several weeks, and in all that time Swift never once paid him a visit. When the patient was sufficiently recovered to go abroad, he waited upon his host, and having expressed his acknowledgments for the asylum which had been afforded him, he said, "I fear, Mr. Dean, I have been an expensive lodger to you this bout." The Dean remained silent; but the female relation who superintended his affairs quickly replied, "It is in your power, Doctor, easily to remedy this, by removing to another lodging." The forward manner in which this was expressed, and the taciturnity of the Dean, left no room to doubt that the intimation had not only his concurrence, but that it actually emanated from his splenetic humour. Shocked at this cruel treatment in his enfeebled state of body, and the distress of his mind, the Doctor silently withdrew from the presence of the Dean, removed as soon as possible from the house, and

never saw the one, nor entered the other any more. Depressed in spirits, poor Sheridan quitted Dublin, and went to reside in the house of one of his old pupils at Rathfarnham, where he had not been long before increasing weakness warned him of the necessity of settling his temporal concerns for the security of his family, and of preparing for his own final change. Accordingly, on the tenth of September, 1738, he sent for a legal friend, with whose assistance his will was properly executed; after which, they dined together, and it was observed that the Doctor was more cheerful than he had been for some time. In the course of the conversation, the same afternoon, some remarks were made on the long continuance of the easterly wind; to which the Doctor made this odd reply: "Let it blow east, west, north, or south, the immortal soul will take its flight to the destined point." The singularity of the observation did not, however, produce any particular impression on the minds of the company, who seeing the speaker reclined back in his chair, apparently in a dose, retired into the garden, that they might not disturb him by their discourse; but on their return they found him quite dead. On opening the body, it appeared that his disorder was a polypus of the heart, which was unusually large; and it is said that Dr. Helsham had sometime before apprized him of the real nature of his complaint, and of the

manner in which it would terminate, which may satisfactorily account for the last words he uttered, when he felt a peculiar sensation that indicated the approach of death.

Thus closed the eccentric career of this ingenious but thoughtless man, who had acquirements and advantages, which, properly husbanded and directed, would have rendered him an ornament of society, and a blessing to his friends. He was a good classical scholar, and an excellent schoolmaster, as far as related to the communication of learning and the exercise of discipline. But his own conduct was so irregular, and his follies so apparent, that he could be ill qualified to enforce those moral principles which he violated every day, and only laughed at when he was exposed. In his appearance he was slovenly, and in his language coarse; but the generosity of his disposition, and the cheerfulness of his manners, threw a veil over these defects and inconsistencies. He was so absent a man, that after inviting a large company to dine with him, he would, without thinking of it, ride out of town to some distance, call upon a friend, and return home in the evening, totally forgetful of the engagement, and equally careless about the consequences of his neglect.

At one time, when Swift was in the country and unwell, the Doctor made an appointment to come for him with a chaise, and bring him to

Dublin on a certain day. The carriage was ordered accordingly, but instead of driving to the place where it should have gone, Sheridan went to another part of the country, thirty miles distant, on a visit to a lady of his acquaintance; and after an absence of a month, sent the chaise in the middle of winter to convey the Dean to town, who refused to go in it alone, which occasioned a temporary suspension of their intimacy. Of Sheridan's forgetfulness, and the Dean's sense of propriety, Mr. Theophilus Swift has related the following instance. "The late Mr. John Whiteway told me, that one Christmas vacation, when he was a school-boy, he was sent by his mother on some message to the Dean: on his arrival, he found his master, Sheridan, sitting with Swift over the fire. After the first salutations had passed, Sheridan took up a book, and began to read. Swift looked at him with an eye of reprimand, which Sheridan disregarded, and continued reading. But every now and then, while Swift was talking to young Whiteway, and endeavouring to entertain him, he would say to Sheridan, "The boy! the boy! the boy! don't you see?" Sheridan, however, whose notions of politeness were not quite so refined as the Dean's, but who probably considered the boy as his scholar, and therefore not entitled to much ceremony, never took his eyes off the book, till Swift at last fairly roused his attention, by

telling him he had no right to behave rude to the boy, though he was his scholar; and actually made him lay it down."

Though Swift and his friend were too often distinguished by a propensity to indulge in scenes of levity inconsistent with their functions, yet on some occasions they could be serious, and superior to low humour, as appeared once when they were on a visit at the episcopal palace of Kilmore; where, after their departure, the following lines were discovered on one of the windows which looks into the churchyard:

Resolve me this, ye happy dead,
Who've lain some hundred years in bed;
From every persecution free,
That in this wretched life we see;
Would ye resume a second birth,
And choose once more to live on earth?

JON. SWIFT:

Dr. Sheridan wrote underneath these verses:

Thus spoke great BEDELL* from his tomb:
"Mortal, I would not change my doom,
To live in such a restless state,
To be unfortunately great;
To flatter fools, and spurn at knaves,
To shine amidst a race of slaves;

* The tomb of this exemplary prelate, who died while in the hands of the Irish rebels, in 1641, is within view of the window.

To learn from wise men to complain,
And only rise to fall again ;
No, let my dusty relics rest,
Until I rise among the blest."

T. SHERIDAN.

As a literary character, the Doctor is scarcely known, except by his connexion with Swift, in whose works are many of his letters and fugitive poetical pieces, some of which are light and pretty, but others are a jingle of rhimes without wit, and many of them extremely low and vulgar. His ballad upon the mineral watering-place of Ballyspellin, in which he has brought together a strange set of words to rhyme with that name, he had the vanity to print in a single sheet. This produced one from the Dean, in which that of the Doctor was very happily ridiculed. Another performance, published by Sheridan, was a song in celebration of the birth-day of Queen Caroline, abounding with such fulsome panegyric, as gave high offence to the author's Tory friends, while it failed to procure him the esteem of the Whigs.

The Doctor appeared to much greater credit as a translator than an original writer; and two of his publications in this line proved that his knowledge of the classic authors, as well as of the customs of the Greeks and Romans, was deep and extensive. These translations were, one of the Tragedy of Philoctetes, from the Greek of Sophocles, printed at Dublin; and the other, a

version of Persius, the Latin Satirist, in prose, illustrated with various notes of different critics. Of this last, there were two editions, one at Dublin, in the Doctor's life-time, and the other at London, the year after his death. In the year 1744, his son, Mr. Thomas Sheridan, published proposals for printing by subscription a quarto volume of his father's remains, consisting, " 1. Of a translation of *Pastor Fido*, from the Italian of Guarini. 2. Several poetical pieces on various subjects. 3. A choice collection of Apophthegms, Bonsmots, Jests, &c.; both of the ancients and moderns." In the prospectus for this publication, it was observed, that " most of the pieces were revised and approved by the Rev. Dr. Swift, who designed to have recommended them to the world, had they been published whilst the author was living; but as he died at the time when he was preparing them for the press, these works for many years lay dormant in the hands of his executors, from whom they were obtained, and are now made ready for publication by his son Thomas Sheridan, M. A." It is rather strange that a collection of papers which came so recommended, and which must have been very curious in itself, should not have met with encouragement from the public. But so it was; and what is still more to be lamented, the apophthegms and witticisms, among which were many of Dean Swift and his friends, have been long since irrecoverably lost, through the

negligence of Mr. Sheridan. The widow of the Doctor, on his death, removed to Dublin, where she lived in a very retired way many years, and died at an advanced age, in mean circumstances. What opinion Swift had of her, appears from these lines, which he composed as an epitaph on her husband.

Beneath this marble stone here lies
Poor Tom, more merry much than wise;
Who only liv'd for two great ends,
To spend his cash, and lose his friends:
His darling wife of him bereft,
Is only griev'd—there's nothing left.

James, the eldest of the Doctor's children, died young, in 1724; Richard, the second, obtained the estate of Quilca, and acted with more prudence than the rest of his family. His son, of the same name, became an eminent pleader at the Irish bar, and was made King's Counsel, and sat in the parliament of that kingdom many years, for the borough of Charlemont. Of Thomas, the third son, particular memoirs will be given in the next chapter: and the youngest of the two daughters married Mr. John Knowles, who was connected with Mr. Sheridan in the Dublin Theatre. Mrs. Knowles was an accomplished woman, and for many years kept a respectable boarding-school for young ladies in York Street, in that city.

*Memoirs of Thomas Sheridan, M.A. and Mrs.
Frances Sheridan.*

THOMAS, the third son of Dr. Sheridan, was born in the King's Mint House, Capel Street, Dublin, in the year 1719; and was baptized in the parish church of St. Mary, having Dean Swift for his godfather. In consequence of this, he became a great favourite with the Dean, who often gave him instruction, attended with frequent presents and rewards when he did well. And, says Mr. Sheridan, in his Memoirs of Swift, "I loved him in return from my boyish days, and never stood in the least awe before him, as I do not remember ever to have had a cross look or harsh expression from him. I read to him two or three hours every day, and often received both pleasure and improvement from the observations he made."

He received the first rudiments of his education under his father, who, with his accustomed want of prudence, sent him at the age of fourteen to Westminster School, where he was admitted on the foundation; but from the poverty of the Doctor's circumstances, he was obliged to quit it in two years, and return to Dublin. Swift, speaking of his friend in one of his letters, says, "He

had one son, whom the Doctor sent to Westminster School, although he could ill afford it. The boy was there immediately taken notice of, upon examination: although a mere stranger, he was by pure merit elected a King's Scholar. It is true, their maintenance falls something short: the Doctor was then so poor, that he could not add fourteen pounds, to enable the boy to finish the year; which, if he had done, he would have been removed to a higher class, and in another year would have been sped off, (that is the phrase to a Fellowship in Oxford or Cambridge); but the Doctor was forced to recall him to Dublin, and had friends in our University to send him there, where he hath been chosen of the foundation, and I think hath gotten an Exhibition, and designs to stand for a Fellowship.* Mr. Sheridan had not long been entered in Trinity College, before his friend, the Dean, took an opportunity of enquiring into the course of his studies; and an observation which fell from Swift, after hearing the report, made such an impression upon the mind of the young student, as had a great influence on his future life and pursuits. "He asked me," says Mr. Sheridan, in one of his pieces, "what they taught in the college? When I told him the

* Swift's Works, vol. xvii, p. 10, edit. 1766.

course of reading I was put into, he asked me, "Do they teach you English?"—"No." "Do they teach you how to speak?"—"No."—"Then," said he, "they teach you nothing."*

This remark was made in 1737; and the year following, Mr. Sheridan lost his father, which melancholy event turned his attention particularly to the subject of education; and he had good reason to hope, that by following the hint suggested by the Dean, added to the reputation of the Doctor as a schoolmaster, he should succeed well in his native city. Many of his friends were of the same opinion, and strongly urged him to carry the idea into execution, offering to assist him with all their interest. He had now been two years at the University, where he was in the certainty of completing his degrees in arts, and in the possession of many advantages which could not fail to secure him a comfortable and honourable establishment. But unfortunately for Mr. Sheridan, he inherited, with much of his father's ingenuity, no small portion of his vanity and obstinacy. He had a considerable portion of classical learning, which, with agreeable manners, and an excellent character, must have ensured him an independence in the honourable line of education. Instead, however,

* Oration delivered at Dublin, on Elocution, 1757—p. 19.

of following that plain and obvious direction which prudence dictated, and friendship recommended, the young man began to entertain the romantic idea that oratory constituted the first of human accomplishments; and that by perseverance he should be enabled to strike out new lights for the improvement of nations, instead of confining himself to the humble employment of instructing boys. Having conceived this wild scheme in his head, all thoughts of a school were abandoned as incompatible with his grand and enlarged views of reviving the lost art of elocution, and of rendering it powerfully instrumental to the progress of the sciences, the cultivation of a refined taste, and the improvement of public morals. The observation of Swift was evidently limited to the necessity of attaining a correct knowledge of the English language, with regard to composition and speaking; upon which sound opinion, and friendly advice, Sheridan erected a visionary hypothesis that dazzled his mind, inflated his vanity, and misled him into a labyrinth out of which he could never be extricated. Had he turned the hint of Swift to a proper use, and applied it to his own edification, and the culture of the rising generation, he would in all probability have so far succeeded as to gain credit by his method of tuition in the progress of his pupils, and the ultimate display of their talents. Instead of this, he turned

all his attention to declamation; and having a deep-toned voice, he succeeded, as he thought, in forming a standard of pronunciation, and of modulating the expression of the language.

His first efforts were in private, within the walls of his college, and in the circle of his friends, whose plaudits gave him encouragement, and flattered his pride. He had now taken his master's degree; and they who were solicitous to promote his interests in the most effectual manner, advised him to commence that office in which his father excelled, and for which the son was still more eminently qualified to be generally useful. But, as if a fatality had been woven into the texture of the whole line, this counsel was not followed; and Mr. Sheridan thinking that the stage was the only way in which he could effect his favourite object, and obtain both popularity and profit, resolved to adopt that profession, for which he seemed to be fitted by the bent of his genius, and the course of his studies. He entertained very exalted notions of the importance of the drama, and of the consequent dignity of an actor, but he lamented the degraded condition of both in his native country; and he formed the resolution of endeavouring to introduce a reform in the Irish Theatre. This design he imparted to some of his most intimate acquaintance in the college, and particularly his tutor, who earnestly dissuaded him from that uncertain occupation, in which,

though fortune might smile at first, it was equally probable that trouble would embarrass his career, and disappointment terminate his prospects. Nothing, however, could allay his enthusiasm, or prevent him from making a public appearance on the boards at Dublin; of which circumstance, Hitchcock, in his History of the Irish Stage, gives this account: "On the twenty-ninth of January, 1742-3, the part of Richard was attempted by a young gentleman at Smock Alley Theatre. This attempt succeeded beyond the most sanguine expectations of the friends of our young candidate for fame, and equalled any first essay ever remembered by the oldest performers on the Irish stage. Thus encouraged, our adventurer a few days after undertook the character of Mithridates in the Tragedy of that name; in which he so amply confirmed public opinion, that he threw off the disguise, and was shortly after announced to the town for a second performance of Richard by the name of Mr. Sheridan."

In a letter which he wrote to Theophilus Cibber, then in London, on the twenty-second of March, Mr. Sheridan says, "I know not how it is, whether it be their partiality to their countryman, or whether it be owing to the powerful interest of a number of friends that I have in this city, but there never was known such encouragement, such applauses, given to any actor, or such full houses, as since I appeared on the stage."

Davies, in his *Life of Garrick*, insinuates that Sheridan had been stimulated to this undertaking by the uncommon success of that great performer, who appeared on the London stage the year before. Let this be as it may, and it is far from being improbable, the same amusing and well-informed writer goes on to say, that "His attempts were answerable to the most ardent expectations of himself and friends. So great was his influence over the Dublin audience, that Quin, who arrived in that city during the first warm glow of Mr. Sheridan's prosperity, with an intention to act a number of characters, and put a handsome sum of money in his pocket (a custom which he had often practised), was obliged to quit that metropolis with disgust, if not in disgrace. He was told by the proprietors that all the acting days, during the remainder of the winter, were engaged to the new actor."*

But this smooth and flattering scene was soon clouded by an unlucky, and, in many points, ridiculous dispute, the occasion of which brings to mind an amusing volume published by a French writer, entitled "*Great Events from little Causes.*" Thus it was in the present instance, wherein a furious warfare was commenced, solely on account of a robe in which Sheridan was accustomed to

* *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 120. edit. 1807.

represent the character of Cato. The manager, however, thought proper to take away this important article, and Sheridan refused to perform without it; on which Theophilus Cibber very officiously offered to read the part of Cato, as well as to play his own character of Syphax, to which the audience readily assented. This brought on a warm controversy between Sheridan and Cibber, the former defending his rights with stately dignity, and the other replying with pertness and disrespect. The latter certainly had no right to interfere in the business; but the former descended beneath himself, when he condescended to engage in a paper war on such a subject, and with so trifling an adversary. In the course of the contention much abuse was poured out on both sides, to the entertainment of the public; and at last some pleasant bye-stander put an end to the mighty affair, by collecting all the papers into a pamphlet with this title: "The Buskin and the Sock; being controversial Letters between Mr. Thomas Sheridan, Tragedian, and Mr. Theophilus Cibber, Comedian."

The year following, Mr. Sheridan visited England, and, on the thirty-first of March, made his appearance at Covent-Garden Theatre, in the character of Hamlet; but at the commencement of the winter season he was engaged at Drury Lane, where, in March, 1745, he represented Siffredi, in Thompson's Tragedy of Tancred and Sigis-

munda, which was then first brought forward under the patronage of Mr. Pitt, afterwards Earl of Chatham, and George Lord Lyttleton, both of whom regularly attended the rehearsals.

While Sheridan was in London, some over-zealous friends affected to set him up as a sort of rival to Garrick; and as this occasioned a quarrel between them, which was not made up when the former went to Ireland, it is reasonable to think that his vanity contributed in some degree to encourage the partiality of his officious admirers. On his return to Dublin, he undertook the management of the Theatre, much more to the advantage of the public than his own, for the Irish stage had long been in a declining condition, and was generally the scene of disorder and indecorum of every kind, that made the place more like a bear garden than a rational seat of amusement. By perseverance and good-nature, Mr Sheridan was enabled to produce some reformation, and hearing that Garrick had an intention of visiting Ireland, he wrote him a letter to this purpose: "That he was then sole manager of the Irish stage, and should be very happy to see him in Dublin, promising to give him all the advantages and encouragement he could expect." He also made an offer to divide with him all profits arising from their united representations, after deducting the expenses; telling him at the same time that he must expect nothing from his friendship, for he owed him none; but all

that the best actor had a right to command, he might be very certain should be granted."

Mr. Garrick was at Colonel Wyndham's when he received this letter; and after looking it over, he put it into the Colonel's hand, saying, "This is the oddest epistle I ever saw in my life."—"It may be an odd one," the Colonel replied, after having perused it, "but it is surely an honest one. I should certainly depend upon a man that treated me with that openness and simplicity of heart." "When Garrick arrived at Dublin, he soon had a meeting with Sheridan, who offered to fulfil his promise of sharing profit and loss; but the former insisted upon a stipulated sum for playing during the winter. The other objected to this demand, and persisted in his first proposal, which, he said, was most reasonable, for then he would receive as much money as he earned, and others would not be losers, when he, perhaps, might be the only gainer. After some little dispute, which Sheridan decided by taking out his watch, and insisting upon an answer in a few minutes, Garrick submitted. The principal characters were divided between them: but sometimes they acted parts of importance alternately, such as Hamlet and Richard the Third. To give a peculiar strength to the Tragedy of Othello, they for several nights acted the parts of the Moor and Iago by turns. The Irish Theatre this season was more splendid and more frequented than usual." This

is the narrative of Davies, who adds to it these curious anecdotes of the duplicity of the Earl of Chesterfield, who was then Lord-Lieutenant. "He bespoke plays very frequently; but though he was very gracious to Mr. Sheridan, and often admitted his visits at the Castle, he took not the least notice of Mr. Garrick; nay, when they both waited on him, with candles in their hands, on the night of Mr. Garrick's benefit, he spoke very kindly to Sheridan, but did not even return the salute of the other. It seems, his Lordship, when in Ireland, had a mind to convince the people of that kingdom that his heart was entirely Irish. When residing at Dublin, he gave intimation that he would encourage Mr. Sheridan's plan of an academy for teaching oratory, in these expressive words: "Never let the thought of your oratorical institution go out of your mind." But when Mr. Sheridan some few years afterwards waited upon him in London, with an expectation that he would fulfil his promise, and be one of his great patrons in his intended scheme, he received him coldly, and gave him a guinea, as his sole contribution to an oratorical academy.*

Notwithstanding the united force of Sheridan, Garrick, Barry, and Miss Bellamy, who frequently acted in the same plays, and though it was the winter season, when the parliament was sitting,

* Life of Garrick, vol. i. pp. 121, 124.

and the town full, they were not able to perform oftener than two nights in a week ; and even then could but seldom insure good houses ; as a proof of which, it appeared that the entire amount of receipts during the season did not exceed three thousand four hundred pounds.

The office which Mr. Sheridan had entered upon was a task of uncommon difficulty, and one that required equal energy and talent. It was indeed little less difficult than the cleansing of the Augæan Stable, in which abuses had accumulated to such an excess, as to be alike offensive to the public and injurious to the theatre. While Mr. Sheridan was silently labouring to bring about a reformation in the house among the performers, an incident occurred that put his fortitude to a severe trial, and for a time portended his ruin ; but which, by his prudence, turned out serviceable to the great cause he had at heart, and conducive in a particular degree to his private happiness.

On the nineteenth of January, 1746-7, a young man named Kelly, being in the pit in a state of inebriety, took it into his head to climb over the orchestra to the stage, from whence he made the best of his way to the Green-Room, where he accosted one of the female performers in such indecent language, and behaved to all who were present with so much rudeness, as compelled them to fly to their dressing-rooms. He followed one of the ladies very closely, but she had time to

secure the door on the inside ; on which he began to make so violent a noise as to disturb the business on the stage, where it happened that Miss Bellamy, whom he had pursued and insulted was then wanted, and could not appear. Mr. Sheridan, who was dressed in the character of Æsop, went to the door, accompanied by the servants and a guard, to whom he gave orders to take Mr. Kelly away, and conduct him civilly to the pit, from whence he came. The directions of the manager were fulfilled punctually, and without the least obstruction or violence ; but when Kelly came into the pit, he took a basket of fruit from one of the women, and when Mr. Sheridan came on the stage, he immediately began to throw oranges at him, with the best aim he could, and one of them happening to strike him, he immediately addressed the audience, and claimed their protection.

Upon this, a few gentlemen in the pit, who were acquainted with the rioter, endeavoured to bring him into order, which was not effected without much scurrilous language applied to Mr. Sheridan, who, in reply to some coarse epithets, let fall this expression : “ I am as good a gentleman as you are ; ” which words, the next day, underwent this material alteration : “ I am as good a gentleman as any in the house.”

When the play was over, the aggressor went out of the pit, and forced his way to Mr. She-

ridan's dressing-room, where he assailed him with the same abusive names as he had before used ; and adding menaces to his scurrility, some blows were given to the doughty hero, who took them quietly ; after which, he went to his club to exhibit his broken nose and other bruises that had been, as he reported, bestowed upon him by the manager while the servants pinioned his arms, and prevented him from defending himself.

Upon this statement, the companions of the rioter were so fired with indignation at the presumption of a scoundrel player, as they termed Sheridan, in attacking a gentleman, that a vindictive party was instantly formed to resent the affront upon the manager and all his abettors. Accordingly, the next day, an open declaration of hostility was made in every coffee-house against all persons who should even dare to look as if they were inclined to take the part of Sheridan.

His name being in the bills some days after to perform the character of Horatio in the Fair Penitent, several written notices were sent to warn him not to quit his house that evening, and to be well guarded even there, as his life was in great danger. This counsel he had the prudence to follow ; and when one of the actors went on the stage to apologize for his absence, and to acquaint the audience with the reason, instantly about fifty of the party, with Kelly at their head, climbed over the spikes on the stage, ran to the Green-

Room, and from thence to all the dressing-rooms; broke open those which they found locked; hastened up to the wardrobe, and ran their swords into all the chests and presses of clothes, in order to feel, as they said, whether Sheridan was concealed there. Not contented with this abominable outrage, one set of the rioters, who were bent upon carrying their malice to the greatest extent, proceeded to the manager's house; but finding that he had provided for their reception, they thought proper to decamp. From this time the theatre was shut for several nights; during which interval the friends on each side exerted themselves with as much heat in vilifying one another, through the medium of the press, as if the case had been a contested election. No political warfare ever raged with greater fury; and to such a height did the disturbers of decorum carry their licentiousness, that the respectable citizens began to be seriously alarmed, and to see the necessity of defending the peace of the community against the violence of a band of profligates. This sentiment soon became general, and an association was formed of the principal inhabitants to protect the manager, and to support a well-regulated stage. Assurances to this effect were then imparted to Mr. Sheridan; and thus relying upon the firmness of his fellow-citizens, he consented to play the part of Richard. The house filled considerably before the usual hour, and a number

of persons declared their resolution to attend frequently, who had not been accustomed to visit the theatre. The play went on for some time quietly, but at the latter end of the first act, when Richard made his appearance, a noise was heard in different parts, but chiefly from the boxes, with cries of "Submission, submission; off, off, off." Mr. Sheridan advanced in a respectful manner to the front of the stage, but was prevented from speaking by louder exclamations of "No submission, no submission; go on with the play."

At this conjuncture, when the contending parties were thus arrayed in hostility, and vociferating vehemently with different commands, the celebrated patriot, Dr. Charles Lucas, rose up in the pit, to assert the rights of the audience, and the freedom of the stage. "He expressed his astonishment and detestation of men's bringing their private quarrels with managers or players into the theatre, and such in his judgment was the case at present; but since the dispute had been introduced, it must, like other disputes there, be determined by the majority. He presumed that every sober person in the house came to enjoy the entertainment promised in the bills, and for which he paid his money at the door. The actors, therefore, were so far the servants of the audience, and under their protection, during the performance; and he looked upon every insult or inter-

ruption offered to them in the discharge of their duty as an insult to the house. The Doctor proceeded to observe, that he apprehended the matter in dispute was no breach of duty on the part of the manager or actors, that was cognizable by any persons present; but whether it was so, or thought otherwise by the persons whom he addressed, the question might be easily determined. He therefore moved, that those who were for preserving the decency and freedom of the stage, should distinguish themselves by holding up their hands; judging, that when they should come to know their numbers and superiority, they would silence, or turn out their opponents."

This speech was listened to with great respect, and ended with shouts of applause; after which, the numbers were so decidedly against the rioters, that the principal part of them retired, and left the performance to pass off without interruption. Still the tempest was only suspended to break out with fresh violence, and with aggravated circumstances of disgrace to the persons engaged in this unprincipled attack upon public feeling, and individual property. At last the matter terminated in a way which established the privileges of the house on a sure basis, and brought great credit to the manager.

It had long been a custom to have a play performed every year for the benefit of the Hospital for Incurables; and the piece appointed for the

present season was the Fair Penitent, which the governors called upon the manager to bring forward on the night that was fixed before the riot began. The gentlemen, at the same time, assured Mr. Sheridan that they would undertake to defend him, being fully satisfied in their own minds that no one, calling himself a man, would sink so low as to oppose a play acted for a charitable purpose, and attended by a brilliant company of ladies. The tragedy was accordingly announced, and the governors went with their white wands at an early hour to the theatre; where the boxes and pit would have been filled with ladies, had not about thirty of the hostile party, who were bent upon mischief, taken possession of the seats near the orchestra. Above one hundred ladies of the first fashion, however, were seated on the stage; and when the curtain drew up, nothing could exceed the brilliant appearance of the house. Here was enough, it might have been expected, to have charmed down all animosity, and to have put off all manifestation of rage for a season; but instead of this, no sooner did Mr. Sheridan make his appearance as Horatio, ushered in by the governors, than the party in the front of the pit, who were all armed, immediately rose, and ordered him off; in which command they were joined by some of their confederates, purposely stationed in the galleries. Upon this, Mr. Sheridan withdrew; and then the most violent altercation ensued between the go-

vernors of the hospital and the rioters in the pit, which proceeded so far as to occasion challenges on both sides. Among the governors was one of the members of the college in his gown, who behaved with so much spirit, that one of the persons in the pit threw an apple at him, called him scoundrel, and applied the same epithet to all the gentlemen on the stage. This naturally exasperated the other members of the college who were present; and as the confusion increased, the performance was dropped that night. The next day, by command of the government, the Master of the Revels issued his orders to close the theatre, till order should be restored; and in the meantime a prosecution commenced against the author of the riot, while the manager, on the other hand, was indicted for an assault.

When the time appointed for the trials approached, the Lord Chief Justice Marlay, who was apprehensive that some foul play might be adopted, in selecting a prejudiced jury, directed the high sheriff to make out and bring to him a list of respectable persons to be impannelled to try these causes. At the time appointed, the trial of Mr. Sheridan came on first; and it being made fully clear that the gentleman entered forcibly into his private apartment, where he attacked him with the grossest language, and that no other person had engaged in the fray at that time, a verdict of acquittal was immediately pronounced

by the jury, without going out of their box. Then the gentleman, as he was called, appeared in his turn at the bar; and in the course of the trial, Mr. Sheridan was called upon the table to be examined; and while he was answering the questions proposed to him, a very eminent, though not very polished, counsellor, on the side of the prisoner, said, "he wanted to see a curiosity: I have often seen," continued he, "a gentleman soldier, and a gentleman tailor, but I have never seen a gentleman player." Mr. Sheridan, without the least embarrassment, modestly bowed, and said, "Sir, I hope you see one now." A loud murmur of applause ran through the court, and the counsellor, notwithstanding his effrontery, sat down abashed, without venturing to ask another question. In short, the jury found the case so clearly established, that they brought in the gentleman prisoner guilty; and the sentence pronounced by the court was a fine of five hundred pounds, and three months imprisonment.

This Mr. Kelly, when the cause commenced, was led to believe that he should be liberally supported, and that hundreds would be subscribed for his defence; but, such is the friendship of the dissolute, he found himself upon conviction wholly deserted; and after suffering some time in confinement, he became so thoroughly sensible of his error, as to apply to Mr. Sheridan, who, at his request, instantly petitioned government to relin-

quish the fine, which was granted; and he then became bail to the Court of King's Bench for the enlargement of the gentleman.

Thus ample redress was procured for the manager and the actors, by obtaining that respect to be paid to the scenes of the theatre in Dublin, which no other, till then, had the happiness to maintain; for, from that hour, not even the first man of quality in the kingdom ever asked or attempted to get behind the scenes; but before that time, every person who was master of a sword was sure to draw it on the stage door-keeper, if he refused him admittance. Such is the account which has been given of this memorable event by Hitchcock and Victor, in their respective histories of the Irish stage; but important as the result was to the theatre, the principal person concerned reaped from it an advantage which abundantly compensated for all the anxiety and trouble through which he had passed. During the recent disturbances which inflamed the Irish capital from one end to the other, a spirited pamphlet was published in vindication of the manager, and calling upon the public to assert their own privileges in defending his rights against a set of beings who were a nuisance to society. The appeal was not made in vain; for being equally elegant and argumentative, it was very generally read, and occasioned many persons to come for-

ward, who would probably have otherwise stood indifferent.

Mr. Sheridan, of course, felt a sentiment of gratitude to the generous advocate who had so powerfully pleaded his cause; and when he became acquainted with the author, that sentiment was converted into another of a softer nature. The tract was the production of Miss FRANCES CHAMBERLAINE, a young lady of Dublin, then only twenty-two years of age, and descended from a respectable English family, of whom Sir Oliver Chamberlaine was her grandfather. She then lived with her maternal uncle, Captain Solomon Whyte, in Dorset Street, with whom she was so great a favourite, that he could not endure the thoughts of parting with her; and though he had no objections to Mr. Sheridan, he gave his consent to the marriage only on condition that the young couple should live in his house till one could be built for them in the same street. In a few months after the first interview, Mr. Sheridan had the felicity of leading his amiable advocate to the altar; and when their house was completed, they removed thither. The situation, though very inconvenient, being at a great distance from the theatre, was fixed on at the special instance of Mrs. Sheridan's uncle; who being then in a declining state of health, wished to have her near him; which desire was the more readily com-

plied with, as they were mutually fond of each other. Here, contrary to what has been said in the *Biographia Dramatica*, and copied from thence into other works, all Mr. Sheridan's children were born, except the youngest daughter, who was born in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden. These were, Thomas the eldest, who died an infant, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Mary, Dublin; Charles Francis, baptized July 23, 1750; Richard Brinsley; and another daughter, who married Mr. Lefanu, the son of William Lefanu, Esq. a gentleman of great respectability, and one of the trustees for the theatre in Dublin.

Mr. Richard Chamberlaine, the eldest brother of Mrs. Sheridan, was an eminent surgeon, in Beaufort Buildings, and for many years the oracle of the Grecian Coffee-house, where he was the delight of the young Templars, particularly those who came from Ireland; for he was a great humourist, and very fond of punning. Of this, he gave a happy instance, when his cousin, the late Mr. Samuel Whyte, opened the seminary in Grafton Street, Dublin, which he conducted with great credit and advantage above fifty years. On that occasion, several of the friends of Mr. Whyte, according to a good old custom, made him presents towards housekeeping; and, among the rest, Mr. Chamberlaine sent him a very handsome tea chest, with this inscription, on a silver plate, neatly let into the lid, "TU DOCES," *Thou teach-est;*

a professional allusion, and by construction, according to the dialect of punsters, applicable either to the article or the owner, "thou tea-chest."

The reader will observe, that the wit of this classical piece of humour lies in its double application; but especially to the occupation of the person to whom the present was made. Yet the author of the "Curiosities of Literature" has transferred the story to the late facetious Harry Erskine, who is said to have caused the same inscription to be placed upon his own tea-chest, in which case the spirit of the pun completely evaporated.

Another brother of Mrs. Sheridan died in Jamaica; and her only sister, Ann, married the Rev. John Fish, Chaplain to the Blue Coat Hospital, Dublin; who, in 1760, left a young family wholly unprovided. This digression may, to some, appear trifling; but the particulars related will be found in some degree useful, as tending to elucidate the history of a family of genius.

Mr. Sheridan being thus settled, divided his time and attention between the concerns of his two families; and as he had the satisfaction of enjoying great comfort in the one, from the tender assiduities of his amiable partner; so, in the management of the theatre, he was gratified in seeing his endeavours to promote a reform aided by his brethren on the stage, and countenanced by the public. Never, indeed, was a change more wanted;

yet it was an arduous task ; for bad habits, confirmed by time, were hard to be eradicated. Performers were unused to regularity, and the taste of the town was palled and vitiated. Many of these disorders indeed were heightened by the negligence of the proprietors and their ill treatment of the actors, particularly in keeping back their salaries. On this account Mr. Sheridan judiciously began the work of improvement in his own department, by punctuality in payments to the performers, who thereby felt themselves under an obligation to him, and were the more ready to submit to those regulations, which otherwise they would have been disposed to resist. In other respects, his methods were so gentle, and at the same time so salutary, that they carried conviction even to the minds of the most refractory. He always attended rehearsals, and settled the business of each scene with such precision, that not the most trifling incident preparatory to the performance was omitted. His great judgment and perfect knowledge of the duties belonging to his situation amply qualified him for an instructor : and his directions were so proper, and conveyed in so pleasing a manner, that they were irresistible, and could hardly fail to meet with approbation and compliance. His highest ambition, in short, seemed to centre in being considered as the father of his company. Such is the account given by the historian of the Irish stage, and for the

most part it is confirmed by all who were competent to form a judgment on theatrical affairs. Yet is it admitted on the other hand, that Mr. Sheridan was extremely opiniated, and obstinate, among his associates; cold, reserved, and dictatorial, to his dependants.

In undertaking this concern, he might have been actuated by very laudable motives, but prudence certainly was not of his counsel in the business; for though in some seasons the returns were considerable, in others the gains were but small. Mr. Sheridan had no doubt a patriotic wish to serve his countrymen by establishing such a theatre in the metropolis as should contribute to the correction of the national taste, feelings, and manners. But it was a project that savoured more of the extravagance of the Knight of Cervantes, than the exercise of a sound discretion, estimating causes and consequences by the standard of experience. He succeeded, it is true, in a great measure to polish the stage, and to restrain the caprice of the people within some bounds; but in doing this, he also created enemies, and weakened the attachment of his friends, who saw with pain that he was stretching his exertions, and carrying his prospects beyond his means.

In 1752 he caused the play of the Conscious Lovers to be performed, and the entire receipts of the house, towards which George Faulkner the bookseller gave fifty pounds, were afterwards appro-

priated to the erection of a monument to the memory of Dean Swift. On this occasion the manager wrote and spoke a prologue, which did credit to his poetical talents, and more to his liberality. This was a measure that could not fail to ensure the applause of the public; but unfortunately about the same time he marred all his labours, and laid the foundation of his ruin by forming an institution within his theatre which was ridiculous in itself, and soon rendered him an object of dislike as a meddler in politics.

The celebrated Margaret Woffington having gained great popularity by her performances in England, was induced, in 1751, to visit Dublin, where Mr. Sheridan engaged her at a salary of four hundred pounds, which in the ensuing season was doubled. But the reception which this actress met with on the Irish stage was fatal to the manager, who was weak enough to institute a Beef-Steak Club, consisting chiefly of Lords and Members of Parliament connected with Government, who were invited to dine once a week in the manager's apartment; no female being admitted but Mrs. Woffington, who was seated in a great chair at the head of the table as president. It has been said that the manager had no political intentions when he formed this strange society; but it is allowed on all hands that the institution soon became decidedly of that character, and the conversation, with the toasts

drank at these meetings, quickly got into circulation. Mrs. Woffington was a particular favourite at the castle; and as she was known to be a very intriguing woman, in which capacity she was secretly employed by the Lord-Lieutenant, the conduct of the manager soon began to be talked of in a manner that indicated a storm destructive of his tranquillity and interests. Any man of common discretion would in such circumstances have sacrificed his private enjoyments, and lowered his vanity in deference to the public voice; but instead of this, Sheridan continued these weekly assemblies, even when they were openly complained of as injurious to the nation, and intended to render the theatre an engine of the government: accordingly, the patriots of the day watched the conduct of the manager narrowly, and determined to seize the first opportunity to make him feel the full force of the popular resentment.

The revival of the tragedy of Mahomet proved an apt occasion for their purpose; and while the piece was in rehearsal, many of the passages were openly made the subject of conversation among the hostile party, as expressing their sentiments, and well adapted to make a strong impression on the audience, to the disadvantage of Sheridan and his friends.

On the twenty-third of February, 1754, was the first night of performance; and the appearance of the pit, which was filled by the leaders of the

country party, evidently manifested dire hostility to the manager. This broke forth immediately after the speech of Alcanor:

If, ye powers divine,
Ye mark the movements of this lower world,
And bring them to account, crush, crush these vipers;
Who, singled out by the community
To guard their rights, shall, for a grasp of ore,
Or paltry office, sell them to the foe.

The moment Digges, who performed that character, had finished these words, the party in the pit roared out, encore, and with such violence, that the actor, after discovering his astonishment, was obliged to speak the whole over again with reiterated applause.

This strange conduct, and direct application of the most striking parts of the play to the manager and his friends, ought to have convinced the former of his danger, and of the necessity of laying aside the piece for the present. Instead of this, he caused the repetition of Mahomet to be announced, and in the mean time convened a general meeting of the performers in the Green-Room, where he thought proper, with great solemnity, to give his hearers a lecture on their professional duties. Among other errors which he noticed as unbecoming an actor, was that of complying with the wanton humour of an audience, and thereby bringing disgrace on himself and his brethren.

This certainly was not a very likely way to soften the violence of the people, or to ingratiate the confidence of the company. Digges, on hearing the pointed address, rose up, and said, that it was very obvious this lecture was levelled at him; but as the play was to be performed the following night, and as the same demand would in all probability be repeated, he desired to know what were the manager's commands as to the conduct he should pursue. To this Mr. Sheridan replied, that he should give him no directions, but leave him to act as he thought proper. Digges then said, "Sir, if I should comply with the demand of the audience, in repeating the speech, as I did before, am I to incur your censure for so doing?" The manager answered, "Not at all: I leave you to act in that manner as you think proper." The next night, the second of March, was that of performance; and the pit was full as soon as the doors were open, nor was the rest of the house less crowded. As soon as the speech was delivered, the actor was called upon to repeat it with the same vehemence as on the former night. Digges appeared to be startled at first, and he stood some time in suspense; at length, on the increase of the clamour, he made a motion to be heard, and when silence was obtained, he said, "It would give him the highest pleasure imaginable to comply with the request of the audience, but that he had his private reasons for begging

to be excused, as his compliance could not fail to be injurious to his interests."

Upon his making this declaration, the party immediately called out, "Sheridan! Sheridan! The manager! The manager!" which cry soon became universal in all parts of the house. After some short time, Mr. Digges left the stage; and the uproar continuing, Mr. Sheridan, who was behind the scenes, ordered the curtain to be dropped, and sent the prompter to acquaint the audience that the actors were ready to perform the play, if they could go on quietly; but if not, the money would be returned. This act of imprudence was casting oil upon the flame, and the prompter was compelled to retire, amidst repeated cries for the manager.

Mr. Sheridan then said, with some agitation, to those around him, and who, in vain, persuaded him to comply with the general voice; "They have no right to call upon me: I will not obey their call; but go up to my room and undress myself;" and up he went.

Some of his best friends left the pit and boxes, and went after to remonstrate with him, and intreat that he would go down and endeavour to pacify the audience. To this prudent counsel he remained deaf; and being strongly possessed with a notion that some personal mischief was intended, he got into a chair, and returned home, leaving the house in the greatest uproar and confusion.

Mrs. Woffington was then persuaded to appear on the stage, in some hope that the presence of a fine woman would assuage the fury; but she was not even suffered to speak; on which, Digges, being the seeming favourite, and the reigning orator, was requested to assure the audience that Mr. Sheridan had not laid him under any prohibition with respect to the repetition of the speech, and therefore could not on that account have incurred their displeasure. That performer accordingly went on, and having obtained a hearing, he repeated what he had been desired; but it was now too late; for as they had called so long for Sheridan, nothing short of his appearance would give satisfaction.

On being informed that the manager was gone home, they insisted that he should be sent for, and added, they would wait patiently an hour, as he was known to live at some distance. Messages were then dispatched to acquaint Sheridan with the resolution of the house, but no arguments could prevail with him to return; and when the hour was expired the call was renewed, after which, two of the leaders, as had been agreed upon, made a signal by going off over the boxes. Then one in the pit stood up and cried, "Long live King George," which was received with three huzzas, and the work of destruction commenced with so much rapidity, that in less than five minutes the part appropriated to the

audience was demolished. After this, some proposed to set fire to the house, while others moved an attack upon the wardrobe. Accordingly a party jumped upon the stage, and with their swords and other instruments cut and slashed the curtain, which cost a considerable sum of money; broke and cut to pieces all the scenes within their reach; but the wardrobe being well defended, they went off through the box-room, where they placed a grate full of burning coals in such a manner as must have produced a conflagration, had not some persons on the watch speedily prevented the intended mischief.

Thus ended this memorable riot, which proved the ruin of Mr. Sheridan, and in a moment totally eclipsed all his brilliant prospects. Of the fortitude of his lady, and the painful trial to which she was put on that occasion, we have an affecting account, as related by her cousin, Mr. Samuel Whyte. That evening she was sitting peaceably at home, in conversation with that gentleman, when a man, horror in his countenance, breathless and pale, without ceremony, rushed into the parlour, exclaiming, "Oh, madam! Smock Alley is in flames."—"In flames!"—"Yes, all in a blaze, madam!"—She rose, and looking wistfully at the door, advanced a step or two towards it; but a little recovering herself, in a half-smothered under voice, scarcely articulated, "Where is your master?"—"At the house," said the man; "all is

uproar and distraction, and I just got away with my life.”—Mrs. Sheridan upon this sat down and waited in a pensive posture for more particulars; but she remained not long in this state of suspense; as the carriage stopped at the door, and Mr. Sheridan came in unhurt. It appeared that the servant, early in the disturbance, anticipating the consequence, ran home in a panic, and was premature in his narrative; but she overlooked his rashness, nor ever once hinted it to his master, for fear that it should turn to the poor man’s disadvantage.

Being thus overwhelmed with difficulties, and unable either to extricate himself or to account with his creditors, Mr. Sheridan let his theatre for two years, and embarked with his wife for England. On his arrival in London he entered into a negotiation with Rich at Covent Garden, upon the plan of sharing the profits of those nights in which he should perform, an engagement which equally marked his vanity and imprudence. His first appearance was in the character of Hamlet, which he performed on the twenty-fourth of October in that year; and this was followed by a variety of characters; but though great exertion was made to draw full houses by magnificent spectacles, and the alteration of old plays, the success of Mr. Sheridan neither answered his own expectations nor those of the manager. As the successor of Barry, who had removed to Dublin, and particu-

larly as the rival of Garrick, he had many obstacles to contend with; and it is certain that the popular opinion was far from being in his favour. The judgment of Sheridan in the requisites of his profession was correct, and his pronunciation was good, but his countenance was inanimate, and his voice unharmonious. There was, besides, a pedantry in his manner of speaking, and a measured precision in his action. On all accounts, therefore, it could not be much a matter of wonder that in his competition he should fail, and that the theatre where he performed was thinly attended when Drury-Lane was filled every night. That season closed his engagement, and there being no disposition on the part of the manager to renew it, Mr Sheridan began to think of his favourite project of an improved system of education; on which subject he wrote thus to a friend, after detailing the failure of his connexion with Rich: "Notwithstanding what I suffered on this occasion," says he, "I have no doubt upon me, but that every thing has happened for the best; and I have so perfect a reliance on the dispensations of that Providence, which knows what is good for us better than we ourselves, that I bore my disappointments not only with resignation, but with cheerfulness. I thought I saw the hand of Heaven pointing out another way of life for me, which from the beginning I had in view, which was the object of all my thoughts and wishes, which alone supported my

spirits in my fatiguing journey towards it, through the miry and thorny roads of the stage, and yet, which I was delaying too long to seek, without considering the danger of procrastination, and the short date of human life. I felt an irresistible impulse, which prompted me to quit the beaten road, and strike through untrodden paths, rugged and impervious as they might seem, in quest of this new region. The greatest obstacle I had to encounter was my health, which I found had been much impaired; yet, in spite of the continued attacks of a disorder the most dispiriting in the world, I began and finished an Essay on British Education in the space of not many weeks; a work only calculated to pave the way for my other designs." The title of this book, the first edition of which came out in the summer of 1758, and the second in 1769, was sufficiently indicative of its character. It was this: "British Education; or the Source of the Disorders of Great Britain. Being an Essay towards proving that the Immorality, Ignorance, and false Taste, which so generally prevail, are the natural and necessary Consequences of the present defective System of Education. With an Attempt to shew that a Revival of the Art of Speaking, and the Study of our own Language, might contribute in a great Measure to the Cure of those Evils."

When Mr. Sheridan took credit to himself for having hastily composed this volume upon one of

the most important subjects that can engage the attention of a moralist, he did, in fact, pronounce the severest censure upon his own precipitancy, as well as upon the crude performance which he had so confidently ushered into the world. To reprobate old and established systems is an easy task, but to lay open their errors, and to substitute a practical plan of reform, demands a detail of observation, and a minute exposition of facts, to convince the intelligent part of the public that what is advanced is the result of inquiry and experience. In the present case, the author of the *Treatise on British Education* thought proper to declaim with vehemence against all our schools for neglecting the English language, particularly with regard to the proper and elegant mode of reading and speaking it. Now, though the complaint might have been just to a certain extent, the person who made it carried his charge out of all bounds of moderation, when he ascribed moral disorders to a defect in which it would be very difficult to prove that morality has the smallest concern. In every age, the best and wisest men have not been remarkable for their eloquence: while, on the other hand, it has been frequently found that persons most distinguished by their oratorical powers have had little else to recommend them. Of elocution, indeed, it may be safely said, that it is as likely to be productive of mischief as of benefit, both upon the minds of

those who excel in it, and upon those who are captivated by its influence; since the one are apt to rely upon their power of persuasion at the expense, even of truth; and the other to receive, without examination, what comes clothed in elegant language, and enforced by an impassioned utterance.

Whatever merits there might be in Mr. Sheridan's Treatise, and it would be unjust to say that it does not contain some judicious observations on public and private tuition, yet, as the outline of a system, it is a confused mass of hypothetical assumptions and contradictory positions, expressed in a style that is sometimes tumid, and frequently vulgar: in many instances, ridiculous, and too often ungrammatical.

The author at this time lived with his family in Bedford Street, opposite Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, where he occasionally entertained several literary and other friends; among whom was Samuel Johnson, who had just then completed his Dictionary; and of whom two anecdotes may be here told on the respectable authority of the late Mr. Samuel Whyte, of Dublin. "We were standing together," says that gentleman, "at the drawing-room window, expecting Johnson, who was to dine there. Mr. Sheridan asked me, 'Could I see the length of the garden.'—" "No, Sir."—"Take out your opera-glass: Johnson is coming; you may know him by his gait."

I perceived him at a good distance walking along with a peculiar solemnity of deportment, and an awkward sort of measured step. At that time the broad flagging on each side the streets was not universally adopted, and stone posts were in fashion to prevent the annoyance of carriages. Upon every post as he passed along I could observe he deliberately laid his hand; but missing one of them, when he had got at some distance, he seemed suddenly to recollect himself, and immediately returning back, carefully performed the accustomed ceremony, and resumed his former course, not omitting one till he gained the crossing. This, Mr. Sheridan assured me, however odd it might appear, was his constant practice; but why, or wherefore, he could not inform me. Now for a dinner scene.

“The house on the right, at the bottom of Beaufort Buildings, was occupied by Mr. Chamberlaine, Mrs. Sheridan’s eldest brother, by whom Johnson was often invited in the snug way with the family party. At one of these social meetings, Johnson, as usual, sat next the lady of the house. The dessert still continuing, and the ladies in no haste to withdraw, Mrs. Chamberlaine had moved a little back from the table, and was carelessly dangling her foot backwards and forwards as she sat, enjoying the feast of reason, and the flow of soul. Johnson, the while, in a moment of abstraction, was convulsively working his hand up

and down, which the lady observing, she roguishly edged her foot within his reach, and as might partly have been expected, Johnson clenched hold of it, and drew off her shoe: she started, and hastily exclaimed, ‘O, fie, Mr. Johnson!’ The company, at first, knew not what to make of it; but one of them perceiving the joke, tittered. Johnson, not improbably aware of the trick, apologized: ‘Nay, madam, recollect yourself: I know not that I have justly incurred your rebuke: the emotion was involuntary, and the action not intentionally rude.’”

“On another occasion, Mr. Whyte, the relater of these anecdotes, who at the time resided in the house along with his good friend, Mr. Chamberlaine, was near getting himself into a hobble. Going rather abruptly into the drawing-room, he found Dr. Lucas, Mr. Sheridan, and Mr. Chamberlaine, with two large folios on the table before them; Johnson’s Dictionary, then but lately published. One of the volumes lay open, and popping his head in among them, the first word that caught his eye was helter-skelter—“Helter Skelter, from the Saxon, the darkness of Hell; which is a place of confusion.”—“That’s a very far-fetched etymology,” cried young Whyte; on which the three gentlemen seemed thunderstruck, and staring at him for a moment, cast a significant look towards the window, where stood an odd looking figure, which he had not before noticed,

observing the boats passing on the Thames. This was Johnson, whom indeed he did not know, and luckily for him, he seemed to be wholly absorbed in his own contemplations. "Well, young Sir," says Mr. Chamberlaine, again casting an eye towards the window, "I suppose you can give us a better derivation."—"O yes, Sir! in an instant; from the Latin, *hilariter celeriter*, merrily and swiftly—won't that do?"—No answer was made, but they hurried him out of the room as fast as they could; and afterwards, with some judicious animadversions on his temerity, our flippant etymologist was made sensible how near he was getting, what perhaps he deserved, a good rap over the knuckles."

Mr. Sheridan being thus disengaged from the London stage, began to turn his attention towards that of Dublin; and accordingly, as the term of the lease which he had let was now expired, and the popular resentment against him having subsided, he resolved to return home, and resume the management of the theatre. With this view he left London at the close of the summer of 1756, and arrived in the Irish capital at the beginning of October. On his first appearance the house was crowded, but he was under the necessity of making an apology for his conduct, in which he very happily succeeded, and concluded amidst the plaudits of the audience, with saying, "Your goodness to me at this important crisis has so

deeply affected me, that I want words to express myself: my future actions shall shew my gratitude." This is the account given by Victor in the History of the Theatre; but a better one is contained in a letter from Mrs. Sheridan to her good friend Samuel Richardson, the printer and novelist. "Mr. Sheridan, on his return," says, that excellent woman, "found he had a more formidable enemy to combat against than any that had ever yet attacked him—an enemy neither to be repelled by force, nor overcome by stratagem, and yet an enemy that he was obliged to enter the lists with—and this was no other than a very poor, and almost depopulated town; for such is Dublin at present. He has, however, been too well used to difficulties to let this wholly dishearten him, and he reassumed the reins of government in his little theatrical kingdom with great alacrity of spirit. Having reformed many things in his own territories, he thought it most prudent, before he again launched out into a troubled sea, to conciliate the minds of the few remaining malecontents: for this purpose, on his first appearance, he made a short speech to the audience, wherein, in very few words, he modestly vindicated himself from the imputation of ever having intended to give public offence. As this was the utmost that was desired by any one, and more than was expected by all, they would scarce permit him to finish what he had to say; and indeed, one-

half of it was drowned in their clamorous approbation. I believe almost every body, of any fashion, that was left in town, was at the theatre that night; and I find fully verified that wise saying: ‘A word fitly spoken in season, how good is it!’ Since that, we have gone on with great peace and tranquillity. The people are very glad to have their entertainment restored to them, and only want to be a little richer to purchase it cheerfully every night; but this circumstance, calamitous as it is in general, gives us an advantage, in regard to the theatre, for I never remember to have seen such constant genteel audiences; but the cause is too melancholy a one for the effects to produce any pleasure; and it will call up all Mr. Sheridan’s attention and diligence to get through so unfavourable a season with any tolerable advantage.

“As for my own little family, the joy of seeing them again has been embittered by the illness of my two youngest children: they have both had fevers, and are but now recovering. Our present abode we find, on many accounts, so inconvenient, and in an air so very confined, that we have been looking out for a little retreat, where the children and I may breathe more freely, and Mr. Sheridan be more master of his time; such a portion of it, I mean, as he is not unavoidably obliged to pass in Dublin. We have at last fixed on a little place in the neighbourhood of the Dean of

Down's villa, to which I believe we shall remove next week; and here Mr. Sheridan hopes to find time himself to tell you how much he esteems, how much he honours you. Meanwhile he commissions me to say thus much for him."

But though every exertion was made to gratify the public taste, by bringing from London Mr. Foote, and some celebrated Italian dancers, this proved an unfortunate season to Mr. Sheridan, who had to contend with opponents already fixed in the favour of the public, and confessedly his superiors in the power of pleasing on the stage. These were Mr. Barry, then at the height of his profession as a tragic performer, and the other, Mr. Woodward, of equal celebrity in comedy. During the absence of Mr. Sheridan, they had so completely succeeded in becoming the established favourites, as to be induced to undertake the formation and management of a new theatre on an extensive scale. This design justly alarmed Mr. Sheridan, who saw clearly enough that, though the scheme must be eventually ruinous to the projectors, it would also be no less injurious to the concern in which he was embarked. To prevent the evil, he made overtures to part with his own theatrical interests to Barry, which the other rejected, on the ground that he was too far engaged with his friends to recede; and, accordingly, the foundation of the new theatre in Crow Street was laid. Mr. Sheridan had recourse now to

measures, preposterous in themselves, and as little adapted to gain him credit with the public, as to conciliate the persons whose operations he endeavoured to counteract. Instead of making a stand with fortitude, and meeting his rivals in fair competition, he petitioned Parliament to interpose its authority against the new building, which he described as not merely hostile to his interests, but dangerous to public morals. He went still farther, and denounced the scheme to government as one that had for its object the spreading of factious principles. Finding that he could make little impression by these strange representations in Ireland, he endeavoured to prevail upon his friend Richardson, whom he complimented as "the best man, and the greatest genius of his age," to exert his influence with Mr. Arthur Onslow, the Speaker of the English House of Commons, in his favour. In this letter, he says, "The new theatre has been built in opposition to me, upon party principles; and if there be not a stop put to it, it will prove a perpetual nurse of feuds and divisions in this unhappy city. They say that kings have long hands: I am sure corruption has. The great spreaders of corruption are not content with the plenteous harvest which they reap in England: they are sowing the seeds of it here, and in all the British colonies. It is amazing to think how warmly some men of high

station in London have interested themselves in raising and supporting this new theatre, merely to keep up a factious spirit: they have written many letters, with their own hands, to persons in power here, in favour of the undertaking. There have not been wanting also some good men of high rank, who have written to others in my favour. My Lord Primate is my fast friend; the Speaker of the House of Commons is inclined to serve me; but I have not as yet such a weight of interest with him as to be sure of his strenuous endeavours in my cause. Now, my good Mr. Richardson, I think it is in your power effectually to secure him to me, and consequently to ensure success. When he was last in England, he received such civilities from the great and worthy Speaker of the English House of Commons, that three lines from him to Mr. Ponsonby would make him exert his utmost influence. A recommendation from Mr. Richardson, of so good a cause, cannot fail of success, with so good a man as the Speaker. Indeed, the contest is, whether virtue or vice, liberty or licentiousness, shall hereafter bear sway in this town. This consideration alone will determine you what part to take; and therefore I shall say nothing of my own interests, or any particular obligation which might be conferred on me. If what I have requested be a proper thing for you to do, I am sure you will do it; if

not, I shall never desire any other reason but your not doing it, to be convinced that I ought not to have asked it."

Richardson readily complied with this request; but the Speaker very properly declined interfering in a concern, which, notwithstanding all the wild declamation of the complaining party, was nothing more than a private speculation, without having the smallest reference to political objects. It certainly ill became Mr. Sheridan to descant so pathetically upon the evil of making the stage a vehicle for promoting the interests of a party, when he had suffered so much himself by his imprudence in that very respect.

Finding that he had nothing to hope from the influence of government, he next proposed the visionary scheme of grafting his new plan of education upon the management of his theatre, which he finally offered to relinquish to the public upon certain conditions. But his remonstrances and overtures were alike ineffectual: the new theatre was proceeded with, in spite of all his exertions; and, as he had predicted, it proved the ruin of those who embarked in the concern.

The season of 1757 was a much more favourable one than the manager could have expected, but he was indebted for this gleam of sunshine in his theatrical career, to the patronage of the Duke of Bedford, who was then Lord-Lieutenant; and not less to the great and deserved popularity

of Mrs. Fitz-Henry, who played to crowded houses. Still this prosperity was momentary, and its continuance extremely uncertain; on which account, Mr. Sheridan began to devote his attention more actively than ever to his favourite subject of education. To carry his scheme into execution, he gave, on the sixth of December in that year, a public breakfast at the Music-hall in Fishamble Street; after which, he delivered an oration on the instruction of youth, in the presence of a numerous company, consisting of persons of the first distinction, and many who were eminent in the world of letters, particularly Dr. John Leland, and Mr. Henry Brooke. The reception which the orator experienced was highly flattering, for he was not only honoured with the plaudits of his enlightened hearers, but he had the satisfaction to find them ready to co-operate with him in carrying the plan into effect, for which purpose near one thousand pounds were subscribed. An institution was also formed, bearing the name of the Hibernian Society, for the improvement of education, and though the scheme was ridiculed and opposed by many, the author of it had the pleasure of enumerating among its friends some of the greatest and best characters in the kingdom. In a letter to Mr. Richardson, he says, "It is scarce a month since the subscription was opened to support it, and we have already upwards of two hundred names in the list, amongst

which there are forty-eight members of parliament. The proceedings of this society are shortly to be published, and I shall do myself the pleasure to transmit them to you. The good Dr. Leland is now employed in making some observations upon them, to silence, if possible, the clamour of the wicked."

While Mr Sheridan was thus engaged, some strong animadversions on his management of the theatre compelled him to print a copious vindication of himself, under the title of "An humble appeal to the public, together with some considerations on the present critical and dangerous state of the stage in Ireland." In this pamphlet, which is written with great spirit, the author took credit to himself for having acted without any sinister views, and upon principles of general utility. "If this account," he observes, "should startle the belief of those who hunt after employments as their only resource, Mr. Sheridan begs leave to remind them that it was not his case: he had it in his power to provide for himself much better than the government could. He had set out in life upon certain principles, early imbibed from his great master, Swift, which would not suffer him to think of such a course. Amongst these, one of the foremost was independence; without which there could be no liberty. By independence, he means only a reliance upon a man's self, and his own talents and labours, for

his support and advancement in life ; for absolute independence belongs not to human beings."

But that independence which he always had in view was never attained ; and the project upon which he laboured with so much assiduity failed to insure him a certain income. The history of the Hibernian Society is indeed so curious, and yet so little known, that somewhat more upon the subject may be amusing to the reader, taken from an account drawn up by one who was engaged in the concern. Mr. Sheridan having thus far accomplished his point ; and proper persons, as he imagined, being fixed on to conduct the business in his absence, at the close of the season in 1758, he visited England, for the purpose, among others, of procuring suitable masters ; but when he thought that the fruits of his labours were ripening, his evil stars, as usual, were conspiring to blight them. Some prejudices were conceived against his theatrical profession, and letters were sent to him, stating the impropriety of placing an actor at the head of the proposed seminary. In consequence of this obstacle, or manœuvre, for it is uncertain whether the objection proceeded from real or pretended scruples, Mr. Sheridan voluntarily relinquished the direction of a concern which had occupied so much of his time and application. He yielded, however, upon certain conditions, which were never complied with, and the only favour he obtained, was that of nominating a substitute.

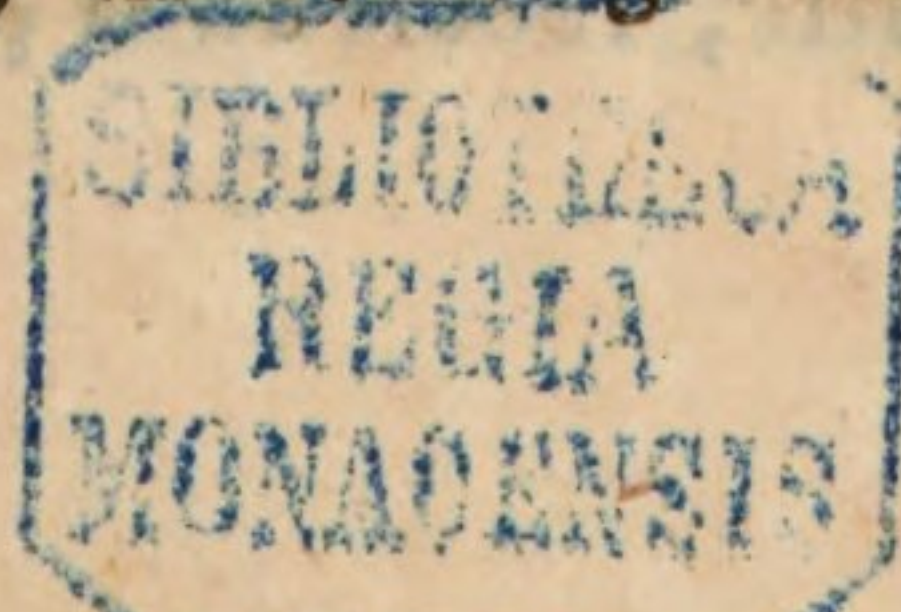
Sometime after this, the plan was partly carried into execution, and the Hibernian Academy was opened in King Street, Oxmantown, under the superintendence of the Reverend Dr. Thomas Leland, Senior Fellow of Trinity College, and author of the Life of Philip of Macedon, the History of Ireland, and other works. Mr. Barry Yelverton, afterwards Chief Baron of the Exchequer in Ireland, was elected head classic master; and the Reverend Mr. Williamson was appointed his assistant. The English department had from the beginning been intended for Mr. Samuel Whyte; and Dr. Leland, who was his particular friend, was very desirous that he should undertake it; but that gentleman being disgusted at the treatment which Mr. Sheridan had met with, and having besides a flourishing school of his own, declined the offer. Mr. Yelverton soon after went to the Temple; and his coadjutor dying, the Rev. John Fletcher was nominated sole master. He was succeeded in about two years by the Rev. Andrew Buck; and by this time the principles upon which the institution was formed having given way, on account, most probably, of their impracticability, the subscribers fell off, and in a few years this boasted establishment became extinct. "Had Mr. Sheridan been a man of the world," observes the author of this account, "he probably would have played his cards better, and never would have been supplanted. But, elated

with his partial success, in stating to the Society the pecuniary arrangements, particularly for the professors in their respective departments, which were liberal to a degree, and touching his expectations of emolument to himself, which were founded on a contingency of surplus, after defraying every expence, he was too explicit, perhaps too sanguine. His arguments were indeed cogent, and his conclusions gained him credit and applause; but his frankness awakened jealousy, and exposed him to invidious attacks. The prospect he exhibited was a temptation to circumvent him; and among his hearers, unluckily, there were some, who neither wanted inclination, nor ability, to speculate upon his capital. That was the rock he split upon; and but for that, to a moral certainty, he might have arrived at that state of independence for which he panted; and at this day his family, though fortunately in situations that do not want it, might have derived honour and advantage from so noble an institution."

But it may be justly questioned whether the establishment was in reality founded upon such principles as would have borne the test of experience. The most natural inference is, that when the conductors came to try the plan, they perceived that it was more specious than useful, more pleasing to the imagination than practicable in the execution: and, in consequence, were obliged to lay it aside among other visionary systems of re-

form, the success of which was never doubted till they were tried, and found wanting.

During the absence of Mr. Sheridan in England, upon the ostensible plea of promoting his scheme of education, but in reality to avoid his creditors, the affairs of his theatre went on in a very declining way, from bad to worse. The wardrobe was in a miserable condition, the actors were badly paid; and when some of the principal ones demanded security for their salaries, the manager thought proper to resent their conduct as an affront: in consequence of which, Mr. King and Mrs. Fitz-Henry, the main supporters of the house, went and joined the rival theatre. Matters being at length brought to the lowest state of wretchedness, Mr. Sheridan gave up the concern, his account with which finally closed on the twenty-seventh of April, 1759. Yet in the midst of all his trouble, vanity preserved the ascendancy in his mind, of which he gave a striking instance while he had the direction of the Irish stage in his hands, by giving a gold medal, worth about twenty guineas, to the author of *Douglas*. For this presumption he was severely attacked some time afterwards at Oxford by Dr. Johnson, who, seeing him in a coffee-house, said, "Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Sheridan, how came you to give a gold medal to Home for writing that foolish play?" At the same time challenging him to produce ten good lines in the piece. The Doctor, in relating this cir-



cumstance at the Literary Club, justified his reprehension by the following conclusive argument: "A medal has no value but as a stamp of merit. And was Sheridan to assume to himself the right of giving that stamp? If Sheridan was magnificent enough to bestow a gold medal as an honorary reward of dramatic excellence, he should have requested one of the universities to choose the person on whom it should be conferred. Sheridan had no right to give a stamp of merit: it was counterfeiting Apollo's coin."

Incontrovertible as this reasoning is, when we consider that Sheridan was a private man, of no authority in the world of letters, it reflects still greater censure upon him, because, by bestowing this reward, he injured, in some degree at least, both himself and his creditors. Though the value of the medal was not of much importance, the sum it cost might have been better bestowed in discharging some of the minor debts of the theatre. Yet an attempt has been made to vindicate the manager in this business: and as the apology offered in his behalf is given in the form of a narrative, we shall relate it in the exact words of the author, Mr. Samuel Whyte, who first suggested the measure to Mr. Sheridan, and was afterwards employed in transmitting the present to Mr. Home.

"When the tragedy of Douglas first came out, Mr. Sheridan, then manager of the Dublin Theatre, received a printed copy of it from Lon-

don; which, having, according to custom, previously read to his company, he cast for representation; for it is true, he highly admired it, and apprised the performers it was his intention to give the author his third nights, as if the play had been originally brought out at his own house; an unprecedented act of liberality in the manager, which, it was thought, would be wonderfully productive to the author. The first night, as the play had received the sanction of a British audience, the house was crammed; and the second night kept pace with the first. The printers meanwhile were not idle: it now issued from the Irish press, and unfortunately for the poor author, a dissenting clergyman, with an ecclesiastical anathema annexed. Things instantly took a new turn: the play was reprobated, and considered as a profanation of the clerical character: a faction was raised against it; and the third night, which was expected to be an overflow, fell miserably short of expenses. The manager was in an awkward predicament; he was the cause of raising expectations, at least innocently, that could not be answered; and stood committed to the author and his friends in a business, which unforeseen accidents had utterly defeated. An unfeeling mind might have let it rest there: but it was not an unfeeling mind that dictated the measure. Something must be done; and though the writer of this account was at that time a very young

man, Mr. Sheridan was pleased to communicate to him his difficulties on the occasion. The first idea was to write a friendly letter to the reverend author, and accompany it with a handsome piece of plate. To this I took the liberty to object; for as I understood he was not a family man, it might run him to expense in showing it, which in such a case was a very natural piece of vanity, and surely in itself no way reprehensible. I rather thought something he could conveniently carry about with him would answer better; suppose a piece of gold in the way of a medal. Mr. Sheridan thanked me for the hint, and advising with Mr. Robert Calderwood, a silversmith of the first eminence, a man of letters also, and good taste, he threw out the very same idea, influenced by pretty much the same reasons. It was executed accordingly: the intrinsic value somewhere about twenty guineas. On one side was engraved a laurel wreath, and on the reverse, as nearly as I remember, at the distance of almost forty years, the following inscription:

“ THOMAS SHERIDAN,
Manager of the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley, Dublin,
presents this small token of his gratitude to the
Author of Douglas, for his having enriched
the Stage with a perfect Tragedy.”

“ Soon after I carried it with me to London, and through the favour of Lord Macartney, it was

delivered to the minister, Lord Bute, for his countryman, the author of *Douglas*. But even this also he was near being deprived of; for on the road, a few miles from London, I was stopped by highwaymen, and preserved the well-meant offering by the sacrifice of my purse, at the imminent peril of my life. It was considered merely as a sort of compensation for the disappointment in regard of the third nights' profits, and certainly no proof of ostentation in the manager."

Of the general truth of this relation there can be no doubt; but in some particulars the narrative is certainly inaccurate; for as Sheridan had no connexion with the theatre as manager after 1759, the medal must have been given by him the year before, which brings it near the time of the first appearance of *Douglas* on the stage, and in print. In that case, though Lord Bute might have been desired to convey the present to Mr. Home, he was neither prime minister nor even in place.

In England, Mr. Sheridan embarked upon a new speculation, which having the credit of novelty, and wearing the aspect of utility, brought him for awhile both popularity and profit. He had some years before composed a body of Lectures on Elocution, which soon after his arrival here he delivered to a respectable assembly at Oxford, where it has been said he was admitted to his degree of Master of Arts, *ad eundem*, on the twenty-

eighth of November, 1758; but as his name does not occur in the list of graduates, the accuracy of this assertion may be doubted. It is certain, however, that he did receive that honour at Cambridge, on the sixteenth of March, in the following year; and the distinction plainly evinced the sense which the heads of that ancient seat of learning had of his merits.

While Mr. Sheridan was thus engaged, his wife resided at Windsor, where she employed herself in preparing for the press the novel of Sidney Biddulph, a considerable portion of which she had submitted some years before to Mr. Richardson, who expressed his warm approbation of the performance, and frequently urged its publication. But she was prevented from finishing the work by another misfortune; and her feeling heart, already sufficiently depressed by domestic troubles, was severely wounded in the loss of Miss Pennington, a young lady, with whom she had been long acquainted, and of whose death she gave this account to her cousin Whyte, of Dublin.

“ The morning of the day on which our deceased friend took her illness, your name happening to be mentioned, she asked after you with great kindness, and told me many civilities which you had formerly shewn her. Yesterday I opened a writing-box, and a little parcel she left me, in which I found some curiosities of value, and

several interesting papers, which she had not before shewn me; among others, a very pretty poem, addressed to her by you; it was enclosed in a letter of my sister Chamberlaine's. We used to set you down in the list of her admirers. She was in every sense an estimable being; a lively sensible companion, and a sincere and discreet friend: naturally affectionate and obliging, her good offices were never wanting where she thought she could be of service. Books to be sure are a great source of entertainment in the gloom of retirement; but the mind cannot be always in a disposition for reading, and there are times and occasions which require more active consolation. Her agreeable conversation was the balm of my solitary hours, and her company in Mr. Sheridan's frequent absences, to which his avocations indispensably oblige him, was to me a material acquisition. My dear Sam, I shall miss her very much; but this is selfish: don't condemn me for it."

This affliction was an inducement to send for her children, who had been left in the care of Mr. Whyte, to whom, on sending the account of their arrival, she thus freely unbosomed her mind on the distress in which her husband was involved. "I believe you are not a stranger to the sad situation of our affairs in Ireland: he is here working his way through difficulties; and nothing but the prospect of having his labours crowned

with success could support him under them: meantime, as all our resources from your side are cut off, we are obliged to be economists, till our affairs are settled upon a better footing, which we hope next winter will effect."

This was written in September, 1759, and on the second of December following she writes thus to the same esteemed friend. "I am extremely glad to hear from all hands that your school goes on so well. I have not the least doubt of your making a figure in your profession. Indeed, it is but a small compliment to say this in the place where you now are; for I believe you have but few candidates for fame in your line: a moderate subsistence in the dog-trot way is all they expect or look for. Mr. Sheridan has gone a good way in the grammar; but as he only writes a little now and then, by snatches, as he is at present engaged in another course, which is to consist of eight lectures, and which chiefly engrosses his time and attention, he has not near completed the grammar; but you may assure yourself he will send it you, together with some other useful hints, as soon as it is perfect enough to be of use to you. He is very much obliged to you for your friendly behaviour, and it redoubles his concern at not having it yet in his power to acquit himself towards you as he thinks you deserve. But as you cannot be a stranger to the ruinous state of our affairs

on your side of the water, so you may imagine these events must, in some measure, influence the progress of matters here; however, Mr. Sheridan is determined to persevere in what he thinks a right path, and I trust in God we shall succeed in the end."

In the theatrical season of 1760 Mr. Sheridan engaged to play at Drury-Lane, where he sometimes performed in the same piece with Garrick, whose jealousy, it is said, was excited by the popularity which his rival obtained, particularly in the character of King John. That play, we are told, was in consequence laid aside by the manager, who could by no means be induced to renew it, even when he knew that it was a favourite piece with his present Majesty, who had been pleased to speak highly of Sheridan's representation of the principal character. This, however, must be considered as an apocryphal tale; for let the feelings of Garrick be what they would, it is scarcely within the limits of probability that he would venture to suppress what the new sovereign admired. But, in reality, the reason for suspending the performance of King John was one of a very different kind, and in which the interests of Sheridan were principally consulted. This was the introduction of the tragedy of the Earl of Essex, written by Mr Henry Brooke, and originally brought out, with some alterations, on the Dublin stage, by Mr. Sheridan,

who then represented the capital character with great applause. The play was now got up at Drury-Lane with equal spirit and success, for which indeed it was chiefly indebted to the superior acting of Mrs. Pritchard as Queen Elizabeth.

In a letter written by Mrs. Sheridan to a friend on the twenty-sixth of February, 1761, she says of her husband, "He stands herein high reputation, with a prospect of being every day more and more esteemed. The late king's death, which shut up the theatres for a time, together with the necessity the managers were under of bringing on the stage five new pieces (farces and comedies) has prevented him appearing so often as it was expected; this, however, though it has a little curtailed his profit, has been no hindrance to his reputation, which stands very high in all the parts he has been seen in. He is now preparing for another course of practical lectures, which he intends to read, and then to publish. I could wish distance did not render communication so inconvenient, as I am sure you might be benefited by some lights from him."

On the twelfth of March, appeared the "Memoirs of Miss Sydney Biddulph; extracted from her own journal, and now first published in three volumes." Of this work, the author expressed herself five years before in these terms to Mr. Richardson: "I think, vanity, under a shew of modesty, is of all the lights it can appear in the most contemptible. How ridiculous then would

it be in me to say I don't think the novel worth printing, after it has had your approbation. Before it was honoured with that, I looked upon it as a thing wrote in a manner so different from the present taste, that I did not suppose any body would read it. But I will not presume to make objections; and since you think it ought not to lie by as mere waste paper, I shall gladly commit it to your hand, to be disposed of as you think proper." The manuscript was accordingly put into the hands of that gentleman, and by him sold to Dodsley, on the account of Mrs. Sheridan, who also made an agreement with Faulkner for an edition to be printed in Dublin. The reception it met with in England fully confirmed the favourable opinion of Richardson, to whom it was affectionately dedicated, for in less than three months it reached a second edition, and afterwards was expanded into five volumes.

The moral tendency of this novel is indeed most excellent; but the distress which runs through the whole work, deepening with heavier shades of calamity as the narrative proceeds, while curiosity is racked in the expectation of relief, cannot render it a favourite with those who seek amusement; and such was the sentiment of Johnson, who conveyed compliment and censure together, in this observation to the author: "I know not, madam, that you have a right, upon

moral principles, to make your readers suffer so much."

Mr. Sheridan was at this period busily engaged in delivering eight lectures on elocution, the subscription to which was one guinea for the course, with a ticket, entitling the bearer to a copy of the whole when published. His reception was very flattering; and after reading his lectures to a crowded auditory at the west end of the town, he was prevailed upon to repeat them at Pewterer's Hall, in the city, and next at Spring Gardens. Incredible as it may seem, the fact is certain, that he had upwards of sixteen hundred subscribers, at a guinea each, besides occasional visitors, which, with the advantage arising from the publication of the course, at half-a-guinea in boards, must have rendered his emoluments very considerable. The shafts of ridicule, however, were aimed at him, particularly in a paper published at Oxford, with the title of *Terræ Filius*, and with still greater effect by Foote, who burlesqued the lectures in his farce of the *Orators*. Notwithstanding these attempts to depreciate his reputation as a public instructor in an art which will ever command admiration, such was the novelty of the plan, and the general desire to become skilled in declamation without much study, that the lecturer proceeded with an increase of hearers and popularity.

Of his success in this profession, we have an account in the correspondence of his lady, who thus wrote to her friend in Dublin at the beginning of 1762: "The course of lectures which Mr. Sheridan is now reading in the city is attended in a manner that shews the people more warm and earnest on the subject than can well be conceived, his auditory seldom consisting of less than five hundred people; and this is the utmost that the hall will contain. Many have been disappointed for want of room; and he is strenuously solicited to repeat the course again immediately in the same place."

About this time he printed, in one volume quarto, "A Dissertation on the Causes of the Difficulties which occur in learning the English Tongue; with a Scheme for publishing an English Grammar and Dictionary upon a Plan entirely new. The Object of which shall be to facilitate the Attainment of the English Tongue, and establish a perpetual Standard of Pronunciation. Addressed to a certain noble Lord."

This nobleman was the Earl of Bute, who received the work with strong marks of approbation, and gave the author very flattering promises of encouragement. Nor did he fail in his word; for in a few months afterwards a pension of two hundred a-year was conferred upon Mr. Sheridan, to enable him to carry on his literary pursuits. In the same year he fulfilled the engagement which

he had entered into with his subscribers, by publishing "A course of Lectures on Elocution: together with two Dissertations on Language, and some other tracts relative to these subjects." This volume he inscribed to the Earl of Northumberland, who was a great friend to his plan of education, of which he gave a striking proof, by placing his son under the instruction of Mr. Sheridan.

After finishing his lectures in London, it was his intention to have visited Edinburgh, where he had formerly been so well received by the first literary characters, that a society was established for promoting the study of the English language. Among the members of this institution were Dr. Blair, Dr. Robertson, and Dr. Adam Ferguson, whose sanction of his plan was certainly a very high distinction. A severe illness, however, prevented Mr. Sheridan from putting his design into execution, or of going that summer farther than Windsor, which was a favourite place with his wife, who called it the seat of her inspiration. She there completed two of her works at this time, the romantic tale of Nourjahad, which is a happy imitation of the oriental manner, and conveys an excellent moral lesson. The other was a comedy, of which she gave this account in a letter to a friend at Dublin; "I had formed my plan, and nearly finished the scenes last summer at Windsor, when I came to town, and shewed it to a few people:

what was said to me on the occasion encouraged me to take some pains in the finishing of it. Mr. Garrick was pressing to see it, and accordingly I read it to him myself. What his opinion of it is, you may judge by his immediately requesting it to be put into his hands, and undertaking to play the second character, a comic and very original one. Mr. Sheridan is to play the first, one of a graver cast, and a great deal of variety, and which requires a considerable actor to perform. My first theatrical essay has so far met with an almost unprecedented success; most of us, poor authors, find a difficulty in getting our pieces on the stage, and perhaps are obliged to dangle after managers a season or two. I, on the contrary, was solicited to give mine as soon as it was seen. It is to come out early in January, (the best part of the winter) and as it is admirably well cast, I have tolerable expectations of its succeeding." The play of "The Discovery" was accordingly performed on the fifth of February, 1763, the principal parts being represented by Mr. Garrick, Mr. Sheridan, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Holland, Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Yates, and Miss Pope. The piece was received with great applause, and was repeated many times during the season; for which success it was certainly indebted principally to the rich acting of Garrick, in the bashful old bachelor.

The liberality of Garrick was the more remark-

able and honourable on this occasion, as he had been treated with a supercilious degree of haughtiness by Sheridan; notwithstanding which, he allowed him for his performance of *Lord Medway* the profits of two nights. Garrick was, indeed, so warm in behalf of the *DISCOVERY*, that he assured a publisher, who afterwards bought a share in it, that it was one of the best comedies he ever read, and that he could not do better than to lay out his money in so valuable a purchase.* The person to whom he said this was Davies, the relater of the anecdote; and therefore, as the fact cannot be questioned, it is a complete refutation of all the idle stories that have been told to the disadvantage of Garrick, with regard to his keeping down Sheridan out of jealousy of his superior talents. That the generosity of Garrick, in this instance, was a spontaneous act on his part, we have the testimony of Mrs. Sheridan herself; and of his candour, we have that of one of the publishers. It is evident, therefore, that he was actuated by sentiments of esteem, and not of selfishness; a desire to serve his friends, and not to promote the mere interests of the theatre, which was under his management. In competition he had then nothing to fear from any quarter, and least of all from Sheridan, who was already well known to an English audience, and whose stu-

* Davies's *Life of Garrick*, vol. i. p. 337.

died pedantic manner could no more eclipse the natural and animated style of Garrick, than the verbal translation of a classic author could equal the original.

The Earl of Northumberland being appointed Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland this year, Mr. Sheridan was tempted by that event, which he considered as auspicious to his interests, to return to his native country. For this purpose, he obtained from the majority of his creditors a letter of license, in which it was stipulated that he should pay into the hands of trustees, for their use, one-half of whatever he should acquire, by acting or otherwise, during his stay there, with a limitation for two years. Accordingly he landed at Dublin on the fifth of November, and took up his residence for a short time with Mr. Barry, at whose theatre he played Hamlet in the following week to a crowded audience. This success continued in an unabated stream during his stay in Dublin, where he performed twenty-four nights, his share of the profits of which amounted to eight hundred and sixty-three pounds one shilling and tenpence. Half of this sum, according to agreement, belonged to his creditors; but, infinitely to his honour, he gave up to them above two hundred pounds more, thus leaving comparatively but a small balance for the maintenance of himself and his family. Such an act of integrity, it was reasonable to have supposed, would have been met

with a corresponding spirit of liberality and forbearance on the part of those to whom he stood indebted. Instead of this, several of the creditors, who had refused to sign his letter of license, lay watching for the expiration of his agreement with Barry, to shew their malignity. While he was earning money, and dividing it among them, these cormorants remained silent; but the moment his engagement ceased, they began to evince hostile intentions. The most determined and virulent of these was George Faulkner, the printer, who held a bond of his, and had but recently received a handsome sum, in part of payment: notwithstanding which, he entered judgment, and without notice ordered execution. Fortunately it happened that the son of the sheriff was at that time under the tuition of Mr. Samuel Whyte, who thereby gained information of what was passing, and without delay hurried Mr. Sheridan on board a vessel bound for Parkgate, where he landed on the thirty-first of April, 1764, by which means the humane design of arresting him was frustrated. This conduct of the Dublin bookseller was very different from that of one of his brethren in London towards Mrs. Sheridan. That lady, encouraged by the reception of her comedy of the Discovery, offered another to the managers of Drury Lane, under the title of the DUPE. This piece was performed on the tenth of December, 1763; but an unexpected opposition being raised, through

the influence of a popular actress, who was offended with the Sheridan family, the comedy was withdrawn after the author's night. She had previously sold the copy-right to Mr. Andrew Millar, who, on the publication of the play, wrote as follows to Mrs. Sheridan:

“ Madam,

“ Believe me, I am truly concerned that your comedy has met with such severe, and, without flattery, I must add, such undeserved treatment on the stage. Neither am I singular in this opinion: the rapid sale is an undeniable proof of its merit, which the public have not been blind to in the closet. The demand for your piece at my shop has been so uncommonly great, that, exclusive of the copy-money, it has enabled me to present you with the enclosed [a bank bill for one hundred pounds], of which I intreat your acceptance, as a small testimony of that gratitude and respect with which I have the honour to subscribe myself,

“ Madam,

“ Your most obliged,

“ And obedient humble servant,

“ ANDREW MILLAR.”

The disappointment which Mrs. Sheridan had experienced in the rough treatment of her play on the stage, was heightened by a controversy carried

on in the newspapers, where the moral language and characters of her comedy were censured in the most outrageous manner by some, and as zealously defended by others. She had the satisfaction, however, of knowing that it was abused only by those who were either little competent to form a judgment upon its merits, or too strongly biased to express it with candour. These were severe trials, especially when aggravated by domestic troubles, and the distressed state in which Mr. Sheridan returned from Ireland. Of the superior dignity of her mind, however, in bearing up against an accumulation of ills, she gave a pleasing proof in an ode which she wrote at this time, and sent in a letter to her confidential friend, Mr. Whyte.

“ London, May 12, 1764.

“ DEAR SAM,

“ I received your's by the hands of Mr. Sheridan, whose sudden arrival not a little surprised me. Though I cannot plead guilty to the charge of not answering your letters, yet I do not really well know how to defend myself; for I cannot take upon me to assert, merely from memory, that I answered ALL your letters; but can venture to say, from the general tenour of my conduct, that I am sure it is impossible that I could have received so many from you without answering them. ONE letter I know I was in your debt when

Mr. Sheridan went over, which I commissioned him to answer personally; and if, as you say, you had written three before that, I either did not get them, or you did not get my answers. But to have done with justifications (which between friends are always best when shortest), I am extremely glad to hear you are established so advantageously, with so good a character, which I have no doubt you deserve, and with such desirable prospects before you. Mr. Sheridan expresses himself much obliged to you for your friendship; for which you have my warmest acknowledgments. And now, SAM, not by way of compensation, for that is not in my power to make you; but as a sort of little regale in your own way, for want of other matter, I will send you the result of a morning's meditation.

ODE TO PATIENCE.

Unaw'd by threats, unmov'd by force,
My steady soul pursues her course,
Collected, calm, resign'd;
Say, you who search, with curious eyes,
The source whence human actions rise,
Say, whence this turn of mind?

'Tis PATIENCE! lenient goddess, hail!
Oh! let thy votary's vows prevail,
Thy threaten'd flight to stay;
Long hast thou been a welcome guest,
Long reign'd an inmate in this breast,
And rul'd with gentle sway.

Through all the various turns of fate,
Ordain'd me in each several state,

My wayward lot has known:
What taught me silently to bear,
To curb the sigh, to check the tear,
When sorrow weigh'd me down?

'Twas PATIENCE! temp'rate goddess, stay!
For still thy dictates I obey,
Nor yield to Passion's power;
Though by injurious foes borne down,
My fame, my toil, my hopes o'erthrown,
In one ill-fated hour.

When robb'd of what I held most dear,
My hands adorn'd the mournful bier
Of her I lov'd so well.
What, when mute sorrow chain'd my tongue;
As o'er the sable hearse I hung,
Forbade the tide to swell?*

'Twas PATIENCE! Goddess ever calm!
Oh! pour into my breast thy balm,
That antidote to pain;
Which flowing from thy nectar'd urn,
By chemistry divine can turn
Our losses into gain.

When sick and languishing in bed,
Sleep from my restless couch had fled,
(Sleep which even pain beguiles),
What taught me calmly to sustain,
A feverish being rack'd with pain,
And dress'd my looks in smiles?

* This seems to be an allusion to the death of her most esteemed friend, the accomplished Miss Pennington.

'Twas PATIENCE! Heaven-descended maid!
Implor'd, flew swiftly to my aid,
And lent her fostering breast;
Watch'd my sad hours with parent care,
Repell'd the approaches of despair,
And sooth'd my soul to rest.

Say, when dissever'd from his side,
My friend, protector, and my guide,
When my prophetic soul,
Anticipating all the storm,
Saw danger in its direst form,
What could my fears controul?

'Twas PATIENCE! Gentle goddess, hear!
Be ever to thy suppliant near,
Nor let one murmur rise;
Since still some mighty joys are given,
Dear to her soul, the gifts of Heaven,
The sweet domestic ties.

“ I will not now take up your time, or my own, with any affected uneasiness about my verses, by way of deprecating your censure, &c. I know you will like them for the sake of the author; and in your hands I have nothing to fear from the severity of the critic. Mr. Sheridan and the children join in being affectionately remembered to you.

“ I am, dear Sam,

“ Sincerely your's, &c.

“ FRANCES SHERIDAN.”

The same month, Mr. and Mrs. Sheridan went to Scotland; for such was the situation of their affairs, and so vigilant were their creditors, that it was not deemed prudent to remain long at one place. Thus the emolument arising from the lectures was cut off through the inability of Mr. Sheridan to deliver them in London, or in the universities, where he was sure of being discovered. At Edinburgh he had some powerful friends, in whose sincerity and encouragement he placed the fullest confidence; but unfortunately his visit to that city was not now so favourable to his views as that which he had made thither about two years before, when he was honoured with the freedom of the city, and had the gratification of seeing a society and an academy formed there upon his principles of education. At this time he found that the curiosity of the people had subsided into indifference, and that the zeal of his former admirers was changed into the mere courtesy of respect. His lectures were thinly attended, and he had no invitation to renew them, which could not fail to produce disagreeable feelings in one who was far from thinking lightly of his art, or of his own qualifications, as a teacher; yet he was still buoyed up by the expectation of gaining his end, and of securing an independence. While at Edinburgh, which he was then preparing to quit, he wrote in these terms to a friend: "I have past a most disagreeable time for these last three months,

having never been one day free from my old complaint, and frequently confined with colds. This, together with some other circumstances, has baffled my design in coming hither. The last has been a most unfortunate year; but I may hope, from the old proverb, that things will mend soon. I shall in a few days set out for London; but have two or three visits to pay by the way: so that I do not expect to reach it in less than a fortnight or three weeks. My plan of operations is settled; and I am perfectly easy in my mind, as I think I shall be guarded against all events from without, and have little to fear but from ill health. The completion of my Grammar and Dictionary must now employ all my time, as the foundation of my future fortune; and I doubt not but a large superstructure may be raised on it. When that is completed, my friends have something in view for me, which will make me easy during my life, and probably enable me to provide well for my family.—Be assured I set a great value on your friendship, as I know it to be sincere—a rare thing in this world!

Nor construe any farther my neglects
Than that poor Brutus, with himself at war,
Forgets the shews of love to other men.

“ But I hope white hours are approaching, and then you shall hear often from me. I shall be always eager to communicate any good news to

my friends, that they may participate of my satisfaction: but I have no delight in their sympathizing with me in my distress. With respect to sharing my good fortune, I could be a very prodigal; but I am a perfect miser in regard to the ill, and would keep it all to myself."

This letter was written on the eighth of August, and at the close of the same month Mr. Sheridan reached the vicinity of London, which he did not think it prudent to enter, on account of his creditors; but diverged to Harrow, where he remained in the same house with his youngest son, waiting the result of those arrangements and negotiations which his wife and other friends were then making for the settlement of his affairs. These, however, were in such a state of disorder, and his claimants so adverse to a compromise, that it was thought most adviseable for him to retire secretly out of the kingdom. Accordingly, at the close of September, he took a circuitous route for Dover, where, being joined by Mrs. Sheridan, and three of the children, they embarked in a packet, and landed, without interruption, at Calais, from whence they proceeded to Blois. Being thus settled in a place of security, Mr. Sheridan wrote the following account of his proceedings and situation to his most esteemed friend, Mr. Whyte:—

“ Blois, October 14, 1764.

“ You see, my dear SAM, by the above date, that I have carried my design into execution, of retiring for some time into France. My friends were unanimously of opinion that it was the best measure I could take, in order to have leisure to finish my work, without which I could have no farther pretensions to any favours. My state of health, too, made it absolutely necessary that I should remove into a better climate; for as my disorder was gaining ground, I should not have been able to do any thing in England. The air here is inconceivably fine: and the alteration it has already made in me makes me confidently hope for a perfect cure. Mrs. Sheridan, Charles, and the two girls, are with me: Dick continues at Harrow. We are very busy in making all our necessary arrangements; so that I have not time at present to enter into a detail of our affairs. The journey was confoundedly expensive; but the cheapness of the place will make full amends. I could support my family here better upon a hundred pounds a-year than upon five in London. We live in a very commodious cottage on the banks of the Loire, in the suburbs of the town. This river is the most beautiful of any in France, and the country around delightful. French is spoken and taught in its greatest purity; and all other articles for the children's education are to be had at a very cheap rate. As I can now bid

defiance to my merciless creditors, I shall be able to make such terms with them before my return as will make me easy for the rest of my life."

From another letter to the same gentleman, it appears that the change of place and leisure for literary employment could not erase the impression of misfortunes which in a considerable degree were the consequences of his own imprudence. He affected philosophy while he was tortured with impatience; and it is evident that the writer of this epistle was at the time of his composing it labouring under hypochondrusis.

He says, "I have had a long fit of my old disorder, which has lain heavy upon me for almost three months past. This malady is to me of the most mortifying nature in the world; for at a time when I was pushing on vigorously a work which it is of the utmost importance to me to finish as soon as possible, it put, as effectual a stop to my progress as if it had deprived me of the use of my hands. Its nature is to take the mind prisoner, and bind up all its faculties, as the gout does those of the body. The least attention, even to the writing of a letter, becomes then an insupportable fatigue. Thoughts, however, continue to circulate: but they will take their own free course, and will suffer no constraint. The tyranny of thought over the mind, when the power of guiding or confining its course is taken away, is a cruel one. One train of reflection

has succeeded to another in this way, without bringing any thing pleasant with them. The several scenes and designs of my past life presented themselves at different times to view, without affording any consolation, but in the rectitude of my intentions; and upon the whole, I find my situation in life very similar to that which is admirably drawn by Pope, where, in answer to the question, What is it to be wise? He says:

'Tis but to know how little can be known,
To see all others' faults, and feel our own;
Condemn'd in business or in arts to drudge,
Without a second, or without a judge.
Truths would you teach, or save a sinking land,
All fear, none aid you, and few understand:
Painful preeminence! yourself to view,
Above life's weakness and its comforts too.

“ One of the greatest comforts of life, I have often been cruelly disappointed in; I mean friendship. However, that shall not make me give up my expectation of still finding that best balm of an afflicted mind in the few for whom I still feel it, and from whom I expect a return. I will believe that you are incapable of change in that respect; but wish you would give me more frequent marks that I still live in your memory. Let us have no retrospects; be a good boy for the future, and I promise you I'll keep pace with you. I find myself much better within these two or three days, and hope the warm weather will

set me up. In every other respect, except that cursed disorder, I find myself much benefited by this excellent climate. Before the last attack, however, I had finished my Dictionary, and was entering upon my Grammar. I shall now try to make up lost time.

“ Mrs. SHERIDAN has finished a comedy, which I think an excellent one, spick and span new throughout. She is now employed in concluding the Memoirs of Sidney Biddulph, to which she was solicited by abundance of people before her departure for England. She bestows many maledictions on the French, which quarrels with her tongue. The children are making great progress in it; and I have made such advances, that I am their master.”

Of the sincerity of Mr. Whyte's friendship, he had a substantial proof a few months afterwards, when, by the sole exertions of that gentleman, he was enabled to avail himself of the benefit of an act then passed for the relief of insolvent debtors in Ireland. As it was impossible that Mr. Sheridan could appear in time to surrender and claim the protection of the bill, Mr. Whyte adopted the extraordinary course of petitioning the Irish House of Commons on his behalf. In this he was unsupported by the other creditors, every one of whom refused to sign the petition; but though Mr. Whyte stood alone, he carried his point, chiefly through the influence of Mr.

Bellingham Boyle ; and a clause was introduced into the act in favour of Mr. Sheridan, who knew nothing of the application to parliament till he was assured of its success. His feelings on this occasion will be perceived in the following letter :

“ DEAR SAM,

“ Your long expected letter has at length arrived, without date. You mention in it that it was writ the post after Mr. Sheen's ; but by some strange fatality it has been six weeks on its passage. I own your long silence astonished me, and raised in me many mortifying reflections. The general neglect which I experienced from all quarters, in my distressed situation, created in me such an apathy for all the affairs of this life, that I was almost brought to wish to pass the rest of my days

“ *Oblitusque meorum obliviscendus et illis.*

“ But your last has shewn me that friendship is not wholly banished from the earth. I find that it is to your care solely I am indebted for the turn my affairs have taken ; and it pleased me the more, as you are the only person living to whom I would wish to owe an obligation. Your silence during the transaction carries its excuse with it. It was better on every account that the attempt should be made without my privity. And to deal ingenuously with you, had

you consulted me, I should never have consented to it. But as the thing has passed with so much credit to me, the whole honour and merit of it is your's. What I mentioned in a former, relative to an act of parliament, had no reference to any such act to be made in Ireland, of which I had not the least idea; but to an English act passed the sessions before for the relief of insolvent debtors, with the nature of which I desired to be made acquainted.

“ You have not made me acquainted with the circumstances of the act, in which, through your friendly and disinterested exertions, I am concerned; nor mentioned the time that it will be proper for me to go to Ireland. I should be glad you would take the first opportunity of conveying a copy of the act to Mr. Chamberlaine, because there are some points on which I would take advice in London, before my setting out for Dublin. And now, my dear SAM, I must tell you, that without your further assistance it will be impossible for me to reap the benefit of what you have done for me. From the perpetual fluctuation in the ministry, the payments are no longer punctual at the Treasury. There is now due to me a year of my pension; and at the moment I am writing to you, I am reduced to my last Louis. I had relied upon receiving about fifty pounds from Sheen, for the books, and a year's rent of a certain farm at Quilca. But this I find, without

any notice given me, has been forestalled ; and Sheen writes me word that he has not a shilling to spare. I had before applied to some friends in England, who had made large professions to me ; but I find, by an obstinate silence on their part, that nothing is to be expected from them. My sole reliance at present is upon you ; nor should I have the least doubt on me, if your abilities were equal to your good will. But I must conjure you by all that is sacred in friendship to raise a hundred pounds for me, as speedily as you can, and convey it to William Whately, Esq. Banker, in London, for my use ; on the receipt of which I will immediately set out for England, in my way to Dublin. Mrs. Sheridan and the children will continue in France, till my affairs are settled ; and after that, you may rely upon it, that this is the first debt I shall think myself bound to discharge. I need not say more upon this head : I am sure your utmost endeavours will not be wanting to serve me in this exigence, and to complete what you have so well begun.

“ And now I must give you some account of what we have been doing since our arrival at Blois. I have long since finished the Dictionary, and have got together the greatest part of the materials for the Grammar, which only want being reduced into order. I have likewise almost finished a volume of Dialogues on the English Language, to serve as a preparative for the other work. The

more I reflect on the general use which must be made of this work wherever English is taught, the more I am convinced that the profits of it will be considerable; and that if I keep the right of the copy to myself (which is my design), it will be an estate to my family. I have finished a Grammar too in English and French, for the use of all foreigners who understand French, that are desirous of attaining a knowledge of the English tongue, by an easy and short method: I have also drawn up a Grammar in English, to facilitate the attainment of the French tongue to all who speak English; a work much wanted, and which I began at first for the use of my children, upon finding the great imperfection of all hitherto published with that view. Mrs. Sheridan has writ a comedy, called "A Trip to Bath," in which some good judges in England find a great deal of merit. She has also made two additional volumes to the Memoirs of Sidney; and has begun a tragedy in prose, upon part of the story contained in this latter part. Thus you see that, together with the time employed in the instruction of the children, we have not been idle since our arrival here. Our coming to Blois has been attended with the happy circumstance of restoring Mrs. Sheridan to a perfect good state of health, a blessing which she had not known for ten years before; and this alone would make me think it a fortunate event which drove us hither. But I have other

reasons to bless this event. It has afforded me an opportunity of acquiring two of the most useful kinds of knowledge which one can be possessed of in this life; I mean a knowledge of the world, and a knowledge of myself. To know the world well, one must cease to be an actor in the busy scene of life, and be contented to be an humble spectator: and to know one's self well, long uninterrupted leisure for self-examination, at a distance from the turbulence and seductions of the world, is essentially necessary. The result of my reflections with regard to the world has been the same with that of the wise man, that it is, 'vanity of vanities.' But I have not, like him, ended my enquiries there. My mind could never rest in so dispiriting a conclusion: it naturally led me to the consideration of another life, where all that is amiss here will be rectified. And after the most unprejudiced enquiries, I remained in the full conviction that it is from RELIGION alone that we can hope for contentment in this life, or happiness in a future one: and the result of my self-examination was, a determined resolution to make her sacred dictates the guide of all my future actions. Don't think, SAM, that either superstition or melancholy have had the least influence on this occasion, for I have not a grain of either in my composition; it has been the effect of a long, cool, deliberate train of reflection.

"I am sorry I was not before made acquainted

with the very kind part which Mr. Boyle took in my affairs. I fear a letter, after so great a distance of time, would appear with but an ill grace; I must therefore beg you will take it upon yourself to make him my most grateful acknowledgments, and at the same time the apology for my silence. You do not say a word about Mrs. Whyte, nor your boy. Do you think that we are indifferent with regard to what concerns you? Assure Mr. and Mrs. Guinness of my warmest regards and best wishes. I did intend to return a few lines in answer to the obliging ones which she added to your's, but you see the paper is finished.

I am ever sincerely

And affectionately your's,

THOMAS SHERIDAN."

"Blois, August 1, 1766."

On the receipt of this letter, his faithful friend lost no time in transmitting to him the sum desired, through the house of Mr. Whately; but before the bills arrived, Mr. Sheridan was involved in a calamity which infinitely exceeded all that he had yet endured, and which called forth the energy of his mind, and the superior consolation of religion. The loss of his excellent partner must have been at any time very distressing to one who loved her tenderly, and who had found in her amiable disposition, and well-stored mind, a refuge from trouble, and relief from care; but

to be thus bereft, at the moment when he was about to leave his family in a foreign land, while he returned home to settle his affairs, was a shock almost too violent for human fortitude to withstand. Mrs. Sheridan had long been in a declining way, through a complication of disorders, which, however, did not assume an alarming aspect; and she died almost suddenly on the twenty-sixth of September, 1766, in the forty-third year of her age.

When the funeral rites were over, and his little concerns at Blois being settled, Mr. Sheridan removed with his children to Paris, from whence, on the thirteenth of October, he sent the following pathetic narrative of his misfortune to Mr. Whyte:—

“Often have I sat down to write to you an account of the most fatal event that could befall me in this life, and as often have thrown aside the pen. Oh, my dear SAM, the most excellent of women is no more! Her apparent malady was an intermitting fever, attended with no one bad symptom till the day before her death, when she was suddenly deprived of her senses; and all the fatal prognostics of a speedy dissolution appeared. She died the death of the righteous, without one pang, without a groan. The extraordinary circumstances attending her case made me resolve to have her opened; when it was found that the whole art of medicine could not have prolonged

her days, as all the noble parts were attacked, and any one of four internal maladies must have proved mortal. If the news of this event has not yet reached Dublin, break it to my sister as gently as you can. I set out from this in a few days for St. Quintin, a town about half way between this and Calais, where I purpose to leave my children in the hands of Protestants, to whom they are strongly recommended. As soon as I have settled them, I shall set out for London, and thence proceed to Dublin as soon as possible. I thank you for your last letter, and the remittance, without which I should not have been able to make this arrangement.—SAM, you have lost a friend, who valued you much. I have lost, what the world cannot repair, a bosom friend, another self. My children have lost—oh, their loss is neither to be expressed, nor repaired. But the will of God be done.

“ I am ever sincerely

“ And affectionately your’s,

“ THOMAS SHERIDAN.”

The literary character of Mrs. Sheridan was highly respectable, and she devoted her talents to the best of purposes. A vein of pure morality, and a strong sense of religion, will be found to predominate in all her productions. Her style is elegant; and in richness of invention, she has not been equalled by any of her own ingenious family.

The pathos which runs through the whole of her principal novel cannot but excite painful emotions in the mind of the reader; but then his feelings will not resemble those produced by the ordinary run of sentimental writers, who create scenes of woe for no other purpose than to shew their skill in operating upon the passions. In the *Memoirs of Sidney Biddulph*, of which the author lived only to print three volumes, the reader finds his heart deeply touched that his thoughts may be carried beyond the present chequered system to a consideration of that futurity, where all the ills of life will be clearly explained, where perseverance in duty shall assuredly meet with an adequate reward, and where the neglect of it will be assuredly punished. Of *NOURJAHAD*, which was not long since successfully dramatized, the moral lesson is still more apparent, because it is happily unfolded by the aid of that imagery which gives to oriental mythology a superior degree of efficacy in the immediate conveyance of striking truths, without burthening the mind with the labour of thought. In that species of romance for which the easterns have been famous, and the excellence of which is admitted by the numerous happy imitations of it among ourselves, a vision or a genius will easily and impressively unfold what no chain of adventures in the ordinary course of life can enable the observer to discover without the patience of inquiry, and the exercise of re-

flection. If Mrs. Sheridan has not reached the excellence of Addison, and the energy of Johnson, in this tale, she has at least the merit of having risen far above the tumidity of Hawkesworth, and the foppery of Langhorne. With respect to her dramatic productions, it is sufficient to observe, that her two published comedies were approved by such men as Garrick and Johnson; and though one of the pieces was unsuccessful in the performance, the treatment which it encountered was more disgraceful to its opponents than to the author. Of the comedy which she left in a finished state, we have no other account than that given by her husband; nor has it been once mentioned by the industrious and sagacious compiler of the *Biographia Dramatica*, though he was apprized that such a piece had been completed, and with the title of it he was made acquainted. It is known to have obtained the sanction of Garrick and Murphy, and through them I believe Dr. Johnson was prevailed upon to give it a perusal, with his judgment upon its merits, which was decidedly in its favour. Notwithstanding the stamp which this manuscript received from such high authorities, it never made its appearance before the public; which is the more unaccountable, considering the peculiar circumstances and professional pursuits of Mr. Sheridan, who caused the two remaining volumes of Sidney Biddulph to be printed, but totally neglected the other literary

remains of the author. Into whose hands her papers afterwards fell, is not clearly known, though it is probable, that by the recent death of her youngest son, some information may be obtained upon the subject.

In all the relative duties of life, Mrs. Sheridan was most exemplary; and no woman, perhaps, had ever a more constant trial for the exercise of them. As a wife, she deputed herself with meekness, and a sedulous attention to the concerns of her household. She watched over her children with maternal vigilance and tenderness; being equally anxious to promote their advancement in virtue as in knowledge. The sterling merits of her character indeed appeared abundantly conspicuous in the troublesome vicissitudes through which she was called to pass, with scarcely any intermission, near twenty years: and it may justly be said, that to have enjoyed the friendship of RICHARDSON, the esteem of YOUNG, and the respect of JOHNSON, indicated no ordinary accomplishments of the heart and the understanding.

At the latter end of October, Mr. Sheridan arrived in Dublin, where he lost no time in complying with the terms of the act of parliament, by appearing in court with a schedule of his debts and effects. On the second of February, 1767, he performed Hamlet, at the theatre in Crow Street, with great applause; and he continued to act fourteen nights, ending with Maskwell, in the

Double Dealer, for his own benefit. Not long after his return to Ireland, he, with his usual precipitancy, mentioned to Mr. Samuel Whyte his design of calling a meeting of his creditors; which the other warmly opposed, conceiving that such a measure was only likely to involve him in fresh difficulties, by raising expectations that could not be gratified, and laying him under engagements which he would be unable to fulfil. Some other persons, however, were of a different opinion; and their judgment coinciding with the sentiments of Sheridan, he published an advertisement in *Faulkner's Journal*, "desiring to meet his creditors at the Music Hall, in Fishamble Street, on Thursday, the second of April, at one o'clock, in order to concert with them the most speedy and effectual method for disposing of his effects, and making a dividend."

Considering the particular obligations of Mr. Sheridan to his friend, this certainly was not such a return as the latter had a right to expect, and the circumstance very naturally occasioned a coolness between them for some time. Mr. Whyte, as a matter of course, attended the meeting, and soon after his entrance, Mr. Sheridan thus accosted him: "Sam, I am glad to see you are come."—Mr. Whyte bowed, and was silent.—On this, the other rejoined: "I perceive you are not satisfied with the measure."—"Indeed, Sir," said Mr. Whyte, "I am not."—A pause ensued, and

Sheridan began to think that he had been too abrupt in the proceeding, but his pride would not allow him to confess his error, and a separation ensued, which was fomented by the officiousness of others, though without any thing like open hostility on either side. At this meeting it was agreed upon that the residue of Mr. Sheridan's effects, consisting chiefly of the surplus rents of a farm at Quilca, which he had formerly purchased of his elder brother, and in his difficulties mortgaged to a brother-in-law, should be vested in the hands of three creditors, as trustees for the whole, who, without any hindrance, suffered him to enjoy the same till his death. Some months after, the estate itself was sold, and the amount appropriated to the discharge of the outstanding debts: though with regard to many of these, the statute of limitations might have been equitably pleaded for non-payment.

On this occasion, an idle tale found its way into some of the newspapers, and which has been since copied into different publications, for the purpose of giving an extraordinary degree of credit to an Irish bookseller on the score of liberality. The story, as it originally appeared in one of the journals for 1768, is as follows: "Last year, Mr. Sheridan the actor obtained an Irish Act of Parliament, protecting him from arrests on account of his debts in Dublin, amounting to sixteen hundred pounds; and having this

season saved eight hundred pounds, he gave notice that he was ready to pay his creditors ten shillings in the pound, and desired them to call on him for that purpose, with an account of their respective demands. Mr. Faulkner, the printer of the Dublin papers, was one of his creditors. This gentleman told Mr. Sheridan that he would not trouble him with his demand till he had dined with him. Mr. Sheridan accordingly called at Mr. Faulkner's; and after dinner, Mr. Faulkner put a sealed paper into his hand, which he told him contained his demand, at the same time requesting Mr. Sheridan to examine it at his leisure at home. When the latter came home, he found, under seal, a bond of his for two hundred pounds, due to Mr. Faulkner, cancelled, together with a receipt in full for a book debt to the extent of one hundred pounds."

Such is the anecdote which has been repeated from hand to hand, in order to magnify the generosity of Faulkner, of whose real disposition towards Sheridan we have already seen an instance. In the present case, the story carries its own confutation, for the schedule of Sheridan's debts amounted to near four times the sum here stated; and of his receipts for playing, which did not much exceed six hundred pounds, no part belonged to his creditors, nor was any portion of it paid to them. If Faulkner did really act as here stated, instead of benefiting an individual, he would have aided

the general fund, for the deduction of his claims must necessarily have increased the dividends of others, without producing any essential advantage to the person who is said to have been placed under so remarkable an obligation.

After playing a few nights at the old theatre in Dublin, Mr. Sheridan, without taking a benefit there, hastened to meet his young family on their return from France, and to make arrangements for their settlement in life. He had also some literary undertakings to complete, particularly those relating to his favourite scheme, of which, in 1769, he published an elaborate outline, addressed to His Majesty, in which he says: "Things are now brought to a crisis. I have, after struggling many years through uncommon hardships, at length accomplished my part, so as to be ready to enter upon the task. To the completion of it, assistance is now necessary; I can proceed no farther without it. The duty that I owe to a numerous family will not permit me to run any further risks. And on the other hand, when I consider the just grounds I have to believe, that if the design be not executed by myself, it never will be by another hand, I cannot help wishing that I were enabled to give my whole attention to it, till it should be established on a solid foundation: Nor will my expectations, I hope, be deemed unreasonable, when the utmost I should propose, during the prosecution of this

laborious task, is, that my income should not be less than what I could apparently make in a more easy way. And I profess to your Majesty, in the sincerity of my heart, and with the same regard to truth, as if I were addressing the Almighty, that I would prefer a competency in this way to all the wealth and honours of this world, in any other course. However strange such a declaration may appear in these times, yet it will not be thought very extraordinary, if known to come from one who has long lost all relish for the pleasures of this life; who never had the smallest sensation of avarice, and has long since seen the vanity of ambition; who has learned to look at time forward, through the same end of the perspective as at time backward; and thus to estimate the duration of life, nay, of the world itself, but as a point in comparison of a boundless eternity; who, therefore, has no other enjoyment left, but the inward satisfaction of discharging his duty, to the best of his power, to his God, to his king, and to his country."

The self-importance displayed in this dedication is of a piece with the familiarity, and, indeed, haughtiness, in which the writer presumed to address the sovereign, who, seven years before, had conferred upon him a grant of no ordinary magnitude at that period, and certainly far beyond the literary pretensions of Mr. Sheridan himself, as well as of the importance of his alleged disco-

very in the proper mode of education. It was too much for him to claim the rewards due to a reformer, before the utility of his plan had been fairly put to the test of experience; and it was the height of arrogance to say that the design which he had projected could be executed by no other hand but his own. It would probably be wrong to say, that the tone assumed in this address operated to the disadvantage of the writer; but it is not illiberal to observe, that such temerity and vanity deserved to be treated with stern contempt. On approaching the monarch of an enlightened nation, splendid genius and approved talents may be permitted to stand with a degree of confidence in the royal presence; but when that confidence goes to the length of expatiating upon the merits of a system that has not yet been proved, and to demand a munificent compensation for services that remain to be performed, it is not to be wondered that the person who acts with such imprudence should meet with neglect, instead of reward.

At the time when Mr. Sheridan sent this address into the world, the novelty of his plan was no longer an object of attraction: its practicability was called in question by the best judges, and even its utility admitted of strong doubts in the minds of those who were disposed to admire it as an ornamental branch of education. But neither argument, nor wit, could weaken the attachment

of the author to his favourite scheme, though he must have been perfectly conscious that it was only a speculation at the very best, as he had never an opportunity of putting it to a trial upon an extensive scale, and for a necessary length of time, whereby alone its efficacy could be determined. In private, he was reasoned with by his friends on the prudence of moderating his expectations, and in public he was severely criticised on the extravagance of his pretensions. The opposition which he experienced on the one hand, and the indifference which his proposals met with on the other, only served to redouble his efforts in behalf of the visionary system which occupied his attention; and now, more than ever, he exerted himself in conversation, lectures, and pamphlets, to render it an object of public notice and patronage. When at last he found that all his endeavours were fruitless, and that the government had other cares to attend to than his scheme of national improvement, he was weak enough to exercise both his pen and his tongue in abusing the depravity of the people, and the corruption of the state. He did not even spare the throne, to which he was so much indebted; and when the disputes with America began to wear a serious aspect, he threatened to carry the blessing of his intellectual refinement across the Atlantic, for the illumination of that country. But this blustering menace appears to have been nothing more than

the effusion of a splenetic mood; and yet it was natural to conceive, that such a declaration, at a time when party spirit ran high, would operate materially to the disadvantage of the complainant, whose obligations to the government and the public were by no means inconsiderable. Sheridan had means sufficient and opportunities enough to have established a respectable seminary either in England or in Ireland, upon a scale fully adequate to the trial of his boasted scheme, and with a fair prospect of an ample emolument for the benefit of himself and his family. But instead of acting in this rational way, he indulged the preposterous notion, that the state was bound to grant a magnificent sum for the endowment of schools, the principal business of which should be to breed a generation of orators. Such was the folly of this man, who had received for many years a pension of no trifling value, to enable him to bring out his Grammar of Rhetoric, and his Dictionary of pronunciation, neither of which had appeared when he complained of the want of encouragement, and affected to talk big of punishing national ingratitude by removing to another land. This design, however, if he ever really formed it, was never carried into execution; and at the beginning of 1769, he exhibited at Foote's theatre a miscellaneous species of amusement, consisting of recitation, singing, and music, under the high sounding title of "An Attic

Evening's Entertainment." The same year, and the next, he also performed several times at that house on a sharing concern; as he afterwards did one season at Covent Garden, on similar terms: but the imprudence of his conduct in vilifying the very source from whence he drew his principal support, gave so much offence that the London theatres were shut against him by command. On this, he travelled as a lecturer, and visited Dublin, where he received a flattering mark of distinction, in having for his pupils the Honourable George Grenville and his brother, who were sent over, accompanied by their tutor, the late Dr. William Cleaver, Bishop of St. Asaph, to study elocution under Mr. Sheridan, who has also been said, but untruly, to have given instructions, in reading English, to her present Majesty.

In 1775, he published two volumes of his Lectures on the Art of Reading, in verse and prose, which were favourably received, and not undeservedly, as an elementary work; though, in many respects, the rules are too artificial and even perplexing. Some years afterwards he made an assignment of this work, together with his former Course of Lectures on Elocution, to Mr. Samuel Whyte, of Dublin, who reprinted them from corrected copies by the author, in three duodecimo volumes. It has been said by some of his biographers, that Mr. Sheridan never appeared before the public as an actor after his performance at

Covent Garden in 1776: but this is a mistake; for on the fifteenth of June, the same year, he played Hamlet at Crow Street Theatre, in his native city, where he continued to act in a variety of characters till the fourteenth of March, in the following year. His receipts for twenty-five nights, including two benefits, amounted to near one thousand pounds, which, considering his advanced period of life, and the declining condition of the Dublin stage at that time, was an evidence that he still maintained his reputation, and possessed considerable abilities in the line of his profession as an actor. He afterwards went into the country for his health, and played the summer season at Cork with corresponding advantages and popularity; but at the close of the same year, a theatrical revolution in London recalled him to a station of great importance. By the retirement of Mr. Garrick from the stage, and the disposal of his share of Drury Lane to Mr. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Mr. Thomas Linley, the composer, and Dr. Richard Ford, an opening was made for the introduction of the elder Mr. Sheridan, as manager of that house. There could be no doubt of his ability for that station, both on account of talent and experience: his integrity also was unquestioned, and of his zeal for the reformation of abuses, the history of the Irish stage afforded ample evidence. But, unfortunately, age and disappointment had soured the temper of Mr. Sheridan,

and he was now totally impatient of contradiction. Some irregularities had gained ground in the theatre, particularly in the demands of some of the female performers, who were not soon brought to hear any thing in the shape of remonstrance, and were extremely offended at the restraints which the new manager thought it his duty to impose. Instead, however, of proceeding by slow degrees in the correction of abuses, and of reconciling the changes which he supposed necessary to the individuals who were affected by them, he contrived his measures so as to make them bear the appearance of reprehension; the consequence of which was, as any one might have foreseen, the whole body became alarmed, disgusted, and in a state bordering on mutiny. The proprietors were his friends, and one of them was his son; but even they could not well approve of his manner, whatever credit they might give to his motives. It was found expedient to restrict his powers; and as this was the surest way to offend his pride, he relinquished his situation at the end of the second season, and returned to his former pursuit of giving lectures on the art of reading and elocution. In 1780 appeared his long promised "Dictionary of the English Language, both with regard to sound and meaning; one main object of which is to establish a plain and permanent standard of pronunciation." This edition, to which was prefixed a Rhetorical or Prosodial Grammar, was

published in two thin quarto volumes; but nine years afterwards the work was reprinted in one of the same size. In the preface, the author vindicates himself from the charge of arrogance, in assuming the character of an arbiter or legislator in the art of pronunciation; and his apology, it must be confessed, is more curious than satisfactory. He sets out by maintaining that the reign of Queen Anne was the Augustan age of English literature, when the language was spoken at court in the greatest purity. Next he asserts that the accession of a foreign family to the throne brought in a corruption of taste, style, and expression. According to Mr. Sheridan, the English tongue was, at the time of his writing, in great danger of becoming a mere jargon; to prevent which evil, before it should be too late, he published this Dictionary, and the grammar prefixed, as a sure and invariable standard of prosody. His main qualification for this important task he grounded upon his intimate acquaintance with Dean Swift, who, by his account, was the most correct writer and the most elegant speaker of the Augustan period of English literature.

Now all this parade amounted to nothing; for it is neither true that the reign of Anne was the most refined era with regard to purity of writing and speaking in the English annals, nor can the shadow of a proof be alleged that the succession of the House of Hanover produced any bad effects

upon our language or manners. Parliamentary oratory under George the Second far exceeded the eloquence displayed at the beginning of the century, as well in purity of diction as in loftiness of sentiment. Nor was that reign less distinguished by elegant writers in prose and verse; for though some of these might have been educated in the latter years of Queen Anne, their genius expanded and improved under her successors. At the time when Sheridan threw out these ill-founded observations, abundant instances might have been adduced in confutation of the whole of his position; and with respect to the conversation of the general body of the people, it was a notorious truth that it had received a material improvement throughout the kingdom within the period which has been treated as a progressive state of declension from the standard of purity. The complaint against the introduction of Gallicisms may be just in part; but it should be considered that many of these idioms were imported long before the accession of the house of Brunswick to the British throne; and he who shall take the trouble of examining the correspondence of eminent persons at the commencement of that century, will discover full as much native coarseness and foreign idiom as in any that has appeared of a more recent date. It is not a little remarkable that among the luminaries who are said to have shed lustre upon the Augustan era of Britain, the name

of Lord Chesterfield should be particularly distinguished, though that nobleman ought rather to be classed among the ornaments of the court in the two following reigns: but the most unlucky circumstance of all is, that, instead of preserving the language in its purity, this noble author, more than any, contributed to vitiate it by French phraseology.

Of the Dictionary of Sheridan, to which this singular apology is prefixed, it would be unjust to say that it has not the merit of novelty and ingenuity. But, on the other hand, it may be questioned whether the device of assisting orthoepy at the expense of orthography, or, in plain terms, of spelling words in an uncouth manner, to direct the tongue in the pronunciation of them, has not a tendency to encourage affectation and indolence. This mechanical process of facilitating instruction may be of some use to those who have not had the advantage of a liberal education; but even the benefit which these persons derive from such a guide, is counterbalanced by the reflection, that they are obliged to rely upon rules, the reasons of which they cannot comprehend. The prosody of any language is only to be correctly known by a study of its grammatical principles and etymological affinities, which will, of course, require diligent application and patient research. But the necessity of exercising the judgment in philological inquiry is precluded by such inventions

as that of Sheridan and his imitators, who have rendered about the same service to literature as the manufacturers of hand-organs have to the science of music.

Some of the booksellers having undertaken a new edition of the works of Swift in nineteen volumes, engaged Mr. Sheridan to correct the press and to write a new life of the author, for which he was remunerated with five hundred pounds. The life was published separately in one volume; and though it of course exhibited many new anecdotes of Swift and his friends, the biography failed to give satisfaction, the materials being thrown together without any regard to order: and while panegyric was lavished throughout upon the Dean, no care was taken to elucidate his character, by an examination of those parts of his conduct which laid him open to animadversion. In this performance, Sheridan betrayed no small portion of weakness and illiberality, in abusing Dr. Johnson for having spoken freely of his great idol; and yet such is the force of truth, he was himself compelled to relate many things which confirmed all that Johnson had advanced upon the character of Swift. Sheridan, however, had a grudge of long standing against his antient friend, and he was now glad of an opportunity of venting his spleen, when he could do it without a retort.

Soon after the grant of a pension to Sheri-

dan, Johnson made use of one of some strong expressions on the occasion, reflecting alike upon the minister and the object of his favour, which the latter never forgave. Yet, by a very strange inconsistency, he affected to take credit to himself for being the instrument of procuring a similar grant to the doctor. In this, however, his vanity assumed what is too improbable to be believed; for his influence was never of that magnitude to give him a privilege of recommending men of talent to court favour. His own pension was bestowed that he might be enabled to carry into execution the plan of a dictionary which he had formed; but Johnson was rewarded for having actually completed one without any assistance. The Doctor had a high opinion of the genius and virtues of Mrs. Sheridan, and he was not without some regard for her husband. But he could not endure the empirical pretensions on which Sheridan prided himself; and he turned into ridicule his whole art of teaching elocution. On one occasion some gentleman, happening to mention a barrister who had so bad an utterance that the company in which he was speaking soon became thin, said, that "he was unfortunate in not having been taught oratory by Sheridan;" to which the doctor replied, "Nay, Sir! if he had been taught by Sheridan, he would have cleared the room."

Of the art itself Johnson had no high opinion;

and of the abilities of Sheridan he entertained one still less favourable: so that, considering the enthusiasm with which the other was actuated, and the lofty ideas which he possessed of his superior skill as a teacher of eloquence, it is not much to be wondered at that he should have indulged a spirit of resentment against so formidable an enemy to his vocation.

In 1785 Mr. Sheridan delivered one or two courses of lectures in London; and during the Lent season of the same year, he united with the celebrated Mr. John Henderson in entertaining the town by reading some of the works of our best writers, and for several nights together they drew considerable audiences at Freemason's Hall. This species of amusement might probably have been repeated with success another season; but the death of Henderson the same year threw the business wholly upon Mr. Sheridan, who could neither perform the task by his own exertions, nor easily obtain an adequate coadjutor. This was his last exhibition in England; and the year following he returned to his native country, where he was consulted upon some improvements then about to be introduced into the public schools. His health now began to give way in such a manner as to indicate the breaking up of the vital system; to reinvigorate which, as far as possible, he visited London in the summer of 1788, accompanied by

his friend, Mr. Whyte, from whom he parted, for the last time, on Thursday, the fifth of August, in Frith Street, Soho; when he went down to Margate, intending, if he received no benefit there, to proceed for Lisbon. But it was soon found that he was past all recovery; and, on the fourteenth of the same month, he breathed his last, in the sixty-ninth year of his age, at his lodgings in Margate, in the churchyard of which town his remains were interred on the following week, without being attended by his nearest relatives. Thus terminated the eccentric career of a man who possessed many virtues, and no inconsiderable share of learning, which, properly applied, might have secured ease and independence for the support of declining life and the benefit of his family. But by an obstinate perseverance in the pursuit of a scheme that only exposed him to ridicule, he sacrificed certain advantages and opportunities, which, improved with a portion of the zeal he manifested in quest of an ideal good, would have raised him above the pity of mankind, and laid his survivors under an obligation of gratitude to his memory. One of the most serious evils attending the wandering course of this ingenious projector was the neglect of his children, who were necessarily left to the care of others in a great degree, when they should have been profiting by paternal instruction and example. A great part of his life, and that wherein he might

have been more usefully employed, was spent in itinerancy, exerting himself for the supply of immediate necessities, but without making any provision for the future; labouring industriously to no permanent purpose, and still indulging the same expectations of success in the vale of years, and amidst repeated disappointments, as had drawn him originally into the wild and trackless ocean of speculative reform.

MEMOIRS
OF THE
RIGHT HONORABLE
RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

CHAPTER I.

Birth.—Early Dullness.—Maternal Affection.—Removal to England.—Settled at Harrow.—Anecdote of his Brother.—Habitual Indolence.—Friendship of Parr.—Death of his Mother.—Witticism.—Taken from Harrow.—Studies Elocution.—Translation of Aristænetus.—Love.—History of the Linley Family.—The Maid of Bath.—Quarrels.—Marriage.

THE second son of Mr. Thomas Sheridan and Mrs. Frances Sheridan was born at the latter end of October, 1751, in Dorset Street, Dublin, and baptized on the fourth of November, in the parish church of St. Mary, by the names of Richard Brinsley; the first after his uncle, and the second after the Right Honorable Brinsley, Lord Lanesborough, Governor of the County of Cavan, and a particular friend of the family.

The disordered state of the father's affairs, and the hurried life which he was compelled to lead, prevented him from paying much attention to the education of his children, which charge devolved

solely upon their mother, till they were of an age to attend the school of Mr. Samuel Whyte, in Grafton Street. It has been said, that when Mrs. Sheridan committed her sons to the care of her cousin, she recommended to him the exercise of patience in his arduous profession, and observed, that she had brought him subjects for the trial of that virtue; for "these boys," continued she, "will be your tutors in that respect. I have hitherto been their only instructor, and they have sufficiently exercised mine; for two such impenetrable dunces I never met with."

At this time the subject of these Memoirs was in his seventh year; and though the remark of the mother was not confirmed by subsequent evidence of an incapacity for learning, the story is, at least, a proof of constitutional indolence.

When the ruin of Mr. Sheridan's theatrical concerns obliged him to visit England, the boys were left in Dublin with a nurse, to whom they were much attached; but upon the remonstrance of Mr. Whyte, they were removed to his house as boarders, and so they continued during their stay in Ireland. Maternal affection, however, was still so attentive to their little comforts, as to make an agreement that the nurse should also reside with them in the family. "Though," says Mrs. Sheridan, in a letter to their tutor, "I have an entire reliance as well on your care as that of Mrs. Whyte, yet I should not choose, at this

distance from myself, to have the children deprived of the servant they have been so long used to. I know it would be a great hardship, on the poor younger one in particular, to lose nurse, who has always hitherto been their attendant. They must necessarily have somebody to dress them, wash for them, and mend their clothes; and if nurse can be made any otherwise useful in the family, I dare say she will be very willing to do her best. I would have her still attend them, and the terms for her can be as easily adjusted as for the children."

With the same tender feeling she says in a subsequent letter: "How are my dear little ones? Do they often talk of me? Keep me alive in their remembrance. I have all a mother's anxiety about them, and long to have them over with me; but I believe we shall not send for them till the latter end of June, and then I hope to see them. I mention this as a matter of business, as I know your number is limited; and, being apprized of our intentions in time, you may the better regulate your own measures, and suit your convenience accordingly."

This was written in March, 1759, and in August following the boys were sent to England: but it is not a little singular that the same complaint of a sluggish indifference to learning should have been made by their mother in a letter from Windsor to Mr. Whyte: "My children are, thank

God, arrived safe and well: they did not come down to me here till last Thursday: they staid a week in London, nurse being willing to wait for their baggage, which 'twas proper she should see safely lodged before she left town. I can't say they do their preceptor as much credit as George Cunningham does, for their progress has been rather small for eighteen months; but, mistake me not; I don't say this, as is too much the absurd custom of parents, by way of throwing a reflection on their teacher, of whose care and abilities I am perfectly satisfied: it is the interest of the master to do every thing to the best of his power for the advantage of his pupils. My children's backwardness I impute to themselves; owing to their natural slowness, their illness, and long and frequent absences, not to any want of attention in you towards them."

The instruction of the children now constituted the principal amusement of this excellent woman, and she had the satisfaction of seeing that her labour was attended with success, of which she did not fail to apprize their former master, in a letter to whom she says:—

"The two boys are getting on in their learning, and I endeavour to assist them, particularly in the English branches, as well as I can. I should often be at a loss what to do with my time in this unsociable place, if I had not the children, with whom I find sufficient employment."

At the beginning of 1762, Richard Brinsley Sheridan was sent to the school at Harrow, then under the superintendence of Dr. Sumner; but his brother Charles still continued at home, to receive the instructions of his father, who always entertained a strong partiality to him, from an idea that he possessed superior genius, and would ultimately prove the most shining character. With this view he took his favourite under his own immediate tuition; and at the age of twelve, the boy was actually exhibited as a public speaker by Mr. Sheridan, in order to shew the efficacy of his boasted method of education. Of this performance, and the intentions then formed respecting the two boys, the following account was given by Mrs. Sheridan to her friend at Dublin, in a letter written on the twenty-fifth of February: "Last Monday evening, Charles, for the first time, exhibited himself as a little orator. He read Eve's speech to Adam, from Milton, beginning, 'O thou! for whom, and from whom I was form'd,' &c. As his father had taken a deal of pains with him, and he has the advantage of a fine ear and a fine voice, he acquitted himself in such a manner as astonished every body. He purposes in his next course to shew him in all the variety of style that is used in English composition, and hopes in a very little time to make him complete in his own art. Dick has been at Harrow school since Christmas: as he probably

may fall into a bustling life, we have a mind to accustom him early to shift for himself: Charles's domestic and sedentary turn is best suited to a home education. This is the present system of your little old acquaintance."

The progress of Richard, at Harrow, was not of a nature to remove the unfavourable estimate which his mother had made of his abilities and diligence. He appeared content with performing his exercises to avoid disgrace; but he was totally indifferent to the stimulus of exertion to obtain praise. For this, indeed, an adequate cause may be found in the circumstance that he was left to shift for himself, without being excited to emulation by the prospect of paternal commendation, or urged to duty by the dread of displeasure in the seasons of vacation. It was the misfortune of this youth to be deprived of domestic endearments and counsels at a time of life when he stood in most need of them, for the correction of bad habits, and the formation of steady principles. The knowledge acquired at school is only valuable as a qualification for the exercise of those virtues, the culture of which materially depends upon the force of parental attention and example. By the wandering course of Mr. Sheridan, his youngest son was in a manner thrown upon the waste at the age of twelve, when proper direction was particularly wanted to guide him into that course where his talents might become useful. As the youth was

naturally indolent and careless, he stood in the greater need of discipline and habitual employment, with the suggestion of proper motives to rouse his dormant powers into action.

In September, 1764, Mr. Sheridan, on his return from Scotland, stopped at Harrow, to wait the result of the proceedings which were then going on for the settlement of his affairs. But his creditors proving inexorable, and no means occurring to effect a compromise, it was found expedient that he and his family should leave the kingdom for some time, till a favourable change might enable him to resume his professional pursuits, which were now unavoidably suspended. Accordingly, having arranged matters for the continuance of his son at Harrow school, he set off privately for France, accompanied by Mrs. Sheridan and the other children.

Thus separated from the friends who should have watched over his morals and regulated his connexions, encouraged emulation, and restrained the passions, young Sheridan was left to indulge his own humours, and to choose his own associates. Among his contemporaries at school were some who have shone with splendour and utility in public life, and in the world of letters: but these were not his companions; and, in consequence of his indifference to learning, he was regarded by the superior boys with contempt. This treatment, however, would sometimes provoke exertion, which

indicated native genius, that only wanted a proper stimulus and cultivation to become eminent; and this did not escape the observation of Dr. Samuel Parr, who at that time was one of the under-teachers of the school. Perceiving in Sheridan strong powers of retention, and an acuteness of penetration, which only wanted friendly assistance to be distinguished, he generously undertook the task of drawing into exercise those mental energies which had too long suffered beneath sloth and neglect. The result did equal credit to the discernment and benevolence of the tutor, who had the satisfaction of finding in his pupil a capacity for learning, and a taste for the beauties of composition. The departure of Parr for Cambridge was a serious loss to Sheridan; but he had another affliction of still greater moment to sustain about the same time in the death of his mother, to whom he was indebted for the elements of knowledge, and whose counsels, if Providence had spared her life, would, in all likelihood, have been of essential benefit to the direction of his conduct and the right application of his talents.

While at Harrow, we are told, he was made a frequent butt for the ridicule of the other boys, particularly those who were born of great families or to brighter prospects. One of the most troublesome and impertinent of these youths, the son of an eminent physician in London, took occasion, in the

play-ground, to exercise his wit at the expense of Sheridan, as being the son of a player: on which the latter quickly retorted, "'Tis true, my father lives by pleasing people, but your's lives by killing them."

It is curious to observe how differently panegyrists of the same person will act when they are obliged to draw upon the fertility of the imagination to supply what they are unable or unwilling to relate in the simplicity of truth. Some of the admirers of Sheridan have attempted the justification of his carelessness at school in the preposterous plea that "he did not feel that pedantic attachment to the learned languages, which, it is said, too often distracts the attention from better pursuits, and gives, to a comparatively useless and cumbersome branch of education, the monopoly of time, talents, and attention."

Another anonymous writer, equally zealous and equally correct, describes the progress of Richard Sheridan at Harrow as having been so great, that his father, in the high delight which he enjoyed from his improvement, did not deem it necessary to send him to the university. Both these well-informed biographers then assert, that, upon leaving Harrow, he was entered of the Middle Temple; though, in reality, that admission did not occur till five years afterwards.

The nonsense about a school-boy's aversion to pedantry in his studies is of a piece with the

ignorance betrayed in the contempt thrown out upon classical learning as a comparatively useless and cumbersome branch of education. Now, though Sheridan was certainly free from literary affectation, he most assuredly had such an opinion of the Grecian and Roman writers, as to consider an acquaintance with them essentially necessary to the perfection of a scholar and the accomplishment of a man of taste. He never expressed the Gothic sentiment, that a comprehensive knowledge of the learned languages was an incumbrance; on the contrary, he has often lamented the negligence of his earlier days, in not having paid a closer attention to pursuits which are the ornament of youth, the profitable employment of maturity, and the delightful solace of declining life.

That he did not complete his studies at any university was owing to very different causes from those which have been represented; for his father was at this time in circumstances that prevented him from indulging such an inclination even if he had thought it necessary. But among the peculiarities of the elder Sheridan, one of the most illiberal was an utter contempt which he entertained and openly expressed for the pursuits of those seats of learning. Though he lay under many obligations to the universities, particularly for the encouragement which he had received from them in the delivery of his lectures, his vanity led him to take very unbecoming liberties

with the course of study carried on in each of them, and which he denounced as radically deficient, because his own system was not adopted. Oratory, by his account, is every thing; and without this great accomplishment, no man, let his talents be what they may, is to be considered in any higher light than that of a mere plodder in literature. Like the brown loaf of Lord Peter, it is mutton and beef; it is fish and flesh; it is meat and drink; containing all the necessaries and all the luxuries of mental food, all the solid virtues and ornaments that can render a man useful to the state, and brilliant in society. With such extravagant notions, therefore, on the superiority of elocution, and a consequent predilection for his own mode of teaching that indispensable requisite as the leading article of instruction, the conduct of Sheridan in taking his two sons under his tuition on leaving school is easily accounted for, without ascribing to either of them the extraordinary merit of having acquired a sufficient store of learning to render a college education unnecessary.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan was in his eighteenth year when he quitted Harrow, where he passed undistinguished, except by the commiseration of Samuel Parr, but where he neither formed any particular friendships, nor left behind him any pleasing marks of remembrance. Shortly after his final removal from school, he went

upon a visit to some friends at Bristol, where his narrow allowance impelled him to have recourse to invention for the supply of his necessities: in consequence of which, he departed from that city in silence and with precipitancy. Such acts of youthful indiscretion and levity are not here alluded to in a spirit of malignity, but for the important purpose of elucidating character, and of shewing the baneful and extensive effects of parental imprudence. Had the father of young Sheridan taken proper care to train him in the exercise of industrious application, and with a view to one of the literary professions, he would have rendered eminent service to his family and the world: but by devoting the talents of the youth to the promotion of a chimerical scheme, which had produced nothing but embarrassment and ridicule, he at once injured his son and destroyed the credit of his own system. Such, however, was the incorrigible obstinacy of this indefatigable and otherwise very worthy man, that nothing could prevent him from making his children auxiliary to the great design which occupied the whole of his life: and he has been heard frequently to say, "that he would rather see his two sons at the head of respectable academies, as a situation the most beneficial to mankind, than one of them prime minister of Britain, and the other at the head of affairs in Ireland."

To this partiality in favour of the preceptorial character, no reasonable objection could be made, provided the person who was so ardent in the cause of education had taken proper measures to qualify his sons for the office. But, unfortunately, in his anxiety to perfect them in the graces of speech, he forgot the more substantial requisites of self-controul, and a disciplined mind, in the labour of patient enquiry and the exercise of the duties which man owes to himself as well as to society. Mr. Sheridan was abundantly competent to the employment of delivering lectures on correct reading and elegant speaking; but he was very ill adapted to train up young men as instructors in general knowledge. Like the moralist in *Rasselas*, who could prelect, with the most convincing force, upon the necessity and advantage of governing the passions, his private deportment would have refuted his principles, or shewn the inefficacy of his rules. Still, perhaps, upon the whole, it is lucky that the scheme of Sheridan was broached at a period less favourable to innovation than the present, and that the trial of its excellence was confined to his own family.

A project so flattering to vanity, and carrying such a shewy appearance of rendering young persons engaging in their manners, and brilliant in their speech, might have gained public support in this season of speculation, when the fashionable mania is to devise short roads to knowledge, by

which children may be mechanically drilled into learning, and the ignorant be made scholars, without the sacrifice of time, or the trouble of laborious application.

Though Mr. Thomas Sheridan was now in the decline of life, his zeal remained unabated; and as his two sons were grown up to manhood, he began to cherish the idea that their combined abilities would materially assist him in his object, and ultimately carry it to a state of complete success and perfection. The eldest, who had long enjoyed the confidence of his father and the benefit of his instructions, was much employed by him in public recitation, and in privately instructing those who were desirous of acquiring correct and elegant pronunciation. When the youngest was taken from Harrow, he also received lessons in elocution with the same view, and his progress very soon gave the father an assurance that he would rise to great eminence as an orator. At this period Mr. Sheridan had a house at Bath, where he read lectures to subscribers, and gave private lessons on reading and declamation to a select number of pupils, in which he was assisted chiefly by Charles, and occasionally by his other son, when he had acquired a sufficient knowledge of the system, the invention of which was regarded almost as a momentous epoch in the history of letters. While he was thus employed, he is said, by one of his biographers,

to have joined with another gentleman in translating the Epistles of Aristænetus from the Greek. There was, indeed, a version of that writer's letters published by Wilkie, in the year 1771; but though it is not unlikely that Richard Sheridan might have had some concern in polishing the language or correcting the sheets from the press, it is certain that he had not the smallest share in the translation; for otherwise, the book, which is but a small one, would have long since been rescued from its state of merited oblivion, on the mere strength of his reputation. But this subject is unworthy of farther discussion; for as Aristænetus was a barbarous author in comparatively a barbarous age, it is evident that the republic of letters would have sustained no injury in the total loss of his productions: nor can any person, however learned and ingenious, acquire credit by wasting his time and talents upon so contemptible a performance.

At the period when Mr. Sheridan is said to have been thus employed, his thoughts were directed to another theme; and his muse was engaged in the expression of original feelings. Love had taken full possession of his heart; and though he had reason to believe that his passion was favourably beheld by the object of it, there were some peculiar circumstances in the case, which almost rendered it desperate.

Miss Elizabeth Linley, the young lady with

whom he was enamoured, shone at that time as the principal luminary of Bath, both in personal charms and musical accomplishments. The enchantment of her vocal powers attracted the admiration of old and young; while her beauty, wit, and captivating manners, drew after her an increasing train of candidates for her affection. She was a native of Bath, where her father then resided, as the principal performer at the public rooms, and as an instructor in music. While a boy, he frequently visited Mr. Chilcot, the organist of the Abbey Church at Bath, who, observing the earnest attention which he paid to his playing, resolved, with great good nature, to give him some lessons, which were not thrown away; for the youth improved so rapidly, as to astonish and rival his master. Mr. Chilcot was a man of liberal sentiments; and instead of repressing this rising genius, he encouraged his exertions, obtained for him a situation as a performer, and recommended him as one who was thoroughly qualified for the situation of a teacher. When the circumstances of young Linley enabled him to maintain a family, he married; and in 1754, his daughter Elizabeth was born, who, in her infancy, evinced an astonishing promise of musical talent, which her father sedulously cultivated. So great, indeed, was her improvement, that at the age of twelve years she was brought forward publicly at the rooms, where she charmed the

company by her taste and execution. It was said, upon the occasion of her first appearance, that there was in her voice the extensive power of commanding all sounds, and every one harmonized by such softness, that it was utterly impossible to resist their combined magical influence.

Her bewitching melody went directly to the heart; and from that time she was always present at every concert in Bath, where she obtained the distinction of being the principal singer.

Two years soon passed away; during which she was continually incensed with panegyric in public, and complimented in private by persons of the first rank. On her first performance, she received the appellation of the SYREN: but she had no sooner reached the age of fourteen, than she began to be known only by the name of the ANGEL; which, in a modified sense, as expressive of her ravishing harmony, graceful appearance, and polished demeanour, she richly merited. Before she was sixteen, all the young men of fashion at Bath were proud of enrolling themselves in the list of her admirers, which, as a matter of course, in a place devoted to idleness and dissipation, occasioned much talk and some scandal. The intimacy that subsisted between her family and that of one Captain Matthews, increased the jealousy of those who wished to engross the attachment of the fascinating warbler

to themselves ; and it served also to sharpen the malice of those who envied both her charms and popularity.

Insinuations, surmises, and reports were circulated about in the form of censure upon Matthews, who was a married man, for his particular attentions to Miss Linley ; and though she was totally ignorant of the freedoms that were taken with her character, as well as innocent of having given cause for them, Matthews had the baseness, out of vanity, to encourage the spirit of defamation as a compliment paid to his gallantry. Scandal like this, however, was too common in that vortex of fashionable amusement, to receive credence even by those who took a pleasure in giving it circulation. The old ladies, indeed, condemned the conduct of Captain Matthews in very affecting language ; and the young ones wondered at the levity of Miss Linley in walking about with a married man, whose courtesy towards her redoubled in proportion as the world made it the subject of conversation. But, notwithstanding all this moralizing on the one hand, and astonishment on the other, the number of her admirers rather increased than lessened ; and serious overtures of marriage were made to Mr. Linley on the part of Mr. Walter Long, a gentleman of large fortune, whose property, amounting to two hundred thousand pounds, has since descended to Mrs. Wellesley Pole Long, of Wanstead House. Mr. Long

was a bachelor, considerably advanced in life; but his wealth, in the estimation of her prudent parents, was more than a counterbalance to the disparity of years. They very gladly accepted his proposals: but as the young lady was at that time under articles of apprenticeship to her father, it was stipulated that the lover should pay him one thousand pounds as an indemnification for the loss of her services.

Miss Linley received the addresses of Mr. Long at first with coldness; and when the offer of marriage with the conditions came under discussion, she objected very strongly to so unequal a match: but the persuasions of her family, and the arguments held out upon the advantages that would arise to all her connexions from this splendid union, made such an impression, that she yielded her consent with reluctance, and preparations for the nuptials were accordingly made. In the mean time, the lady withdrew from public exhibitions, and nothing was talked of at Bath but the approaching wedding, which excited envy enough in the female circles, and no small portion of chagrin and disappointment among the young men, who had been contending with each other for this fair prize. While female expectation was thus on the wing, and the mortified spirits of the men were brooding in apprehension, a new scene suddenly occurred for the exercise of observation and the encouragement of desire.

The dresses were made, and the day for the solemnity was fixed; when, all at once, the young lady altered her mind, and told her father in plain terms, "that if she married at all, she would do so to be free, and not to be a slave." In this resolution she persisted with uncommon firmness, though she had to conflict with the remonstrances of some, and the reproaches of others, the intreaties of her friends, and the ridicule of the malignant.

Numerous were the conjectures, and different were the stories told upon this occasion. By one party the blame was cast upon the lady; but in general, the censure fell upon the capricious lover: and that this was just, appeared evident from the circumstances of the case, when the father claimed and received a remuneration for the damage which he had sustained in the temporary suspension of his daughter's performances at the public concerts. To such a remuneration he certainly would not have been entitled, nor could he have supported a demand of that kind, had the cause of the breach rested solely with the young lady. But it is a curious fact, that this affair was subjected to an arbitration in the same formal manner as if it had been a mere matter of bargain and sale in the way of trade. The business of course was regularly and minutely investigated; and the arbitrators on both sides gave their decree that Mr. Long should pay one

thousand pounds to the father in trust for his daughter when she should come of age.

This singular affair made a great noise in the fashionable world; but though it afforded abundant matter for idle conversation, it produced no effects injurious to the reputation of Miss Linley, unless the circumstance of her being dramatized as the "Maid of Bath" by the modern Aristophanes could be considered in that light. Foote, whose piercing genius was always on the alert to pounce upon subjects for comic representation, gladly seized upon this romantic history, which, in all its incidents and characters, wore a complete theatrical appearance.

There can be little doubt that the leading points in that entertaining drama corresponded pretty exactly with the truth, however some of the personages and scenes might be overdrawn. Miss Linnet, the heroine of the piece, is indeed described as guilty of a little flirtation; but the picture of the sordid lover furnishes an ample apology for her resistance to the wishes of her parents. The prologue to this comedy was written by Garrick; and from his intimate knowledge of the parties, he must have been well acquainted with the particulars of the transaction which he contributed to bring before the public in a ludicrous light. Now, whatever disposition there might have been in the satirist to work up his materials into a caricature, it cannot be supposed that Gar-

rick would have given the sanction of his name to any calumnious exhibition upon the stage, particularly of persons with whom he was upon friendly terms. It may be presumed, therefore, that the story of the "Maid of Bath," with the exception of some of the characters necessarily introduced to help on the business, and to excite mirth, was a correct delineation of a transaction which at that time constituted the general topic of discourse.

Sometime before this separation, Mr. Charles Francis Sheridan had made a declaration of his passion for Miss Linley, but without the approbation of his own father, or the encouragement of the parents of the lady. The weighty pretensions of Mr. Long extinguished his hopes, which were, however, rekindled with greater ardour after this determined opposition to a discordant union that had nothing to recommend it but a mercenary policy.

Though the lady had not given any particular encouragement to Charles, he very naturally attributed her refusal of Mr. Long to a tender sentiment in favour of a lover somewhat more engaging in his appearance, and nearer to her own age. Having no reason to think that he was disagreeable to her, or that his attentions were unacceptable, he flattered himself that a renewal of his addresses would be rewarded by her hand. But at the moment when he was indulging this

expectation, a much more formidable rival than Mr. Long had gained complete possession of that heart for which so many were still in eager contention.

The eyes of lovers are generally quick, and penetrating into all the movements and connexions of those to whom they are attached; yet, in the present instance, it was remarkable enough that Charles witnessed the lively freedoms which passed between his brother and Miss Linley, without forming the least suspicion of the real cause. So far, indeed, was he from being jealous on account of their repeated interviews, that he seemed to take a pleasure in them, most probably from a confidence that his interest was strengthened and secured by this friendship and familiarity. It would be carrying moral reflection a little too far, to pass any severe animadversion upon the duplicity with which the young lovers acted; although it is impossible to justify their conduct from the charge of insincerity, and want of candour. While Charles continued his addresses, and his brother was made his confidant, the latter was in the daily practice of meeting her at the house of Captain Matthews, or in the walks near Bath. A favourite place where they were accustomed to interchange their sentiments was a grotto in a retired part of Sidney Gardens; and on some occasion, young Sheridan having ventured to remonstrate with the lady in a graver manner than she seemed

to approve, he wrote the following verses, which he left on the seat of the grotto for her perusal:—

I.

Uncouth is this moss-cover'd grotto of stone,
And damp is the shade of this dew-dripping tree ;
Yet I this rude grotto with rapture will own ;
And willow, thy damps are refreshing to me.

II.

For this is the grotto where Delia reclin'd,
As late I in secret her confidence sought ;
And this is the tree kept her safe from the wind,
As blushing she heard the grave lesson I taught.

III.

Then tell me, thou grotto of moss-cover'd stone,
And tell me, thou willow with leaves dripping dew,
Did Delia seem vex'd when Horatio was gone ?
And did she confess her resentment to you ?

IV.

Methinks now each bough, as you're waving it, tries
To whisper a cause for the sorrow I feel :
To hint how she frown'd when I dar'd to advise ;
And sigh'd when she saw that I did it with zeal.

V.

True, true, silly leaves, so she did, I allow ;
She frown'd ; but no rage in her looks did I see :
She frown'd ; but reflection had clouded her brow :
She sigh'd ; but, perhaps, 'twas in pity for me.

VI.

Then wave thy leaves brisker, thou willow of woe ;
I tell thee no rage in her looks could I see ;
I cannot, I will not, believe it was so,
She was not, she could not, be angry with me.

VII.

For well did she know that my heart meant no wrong ;
It sunk at the thought but of giving her pain ;
But trusted its task to a faltering tongue,
Which err'd from the feelings it could not explain.

VIII.

Yet, oh ! if, indeed, I've offended the maid ;
If Delia my humble monition refuse ;
Sweet willow, the next time she visits thy shade,
Fan gently her bosom, and plead my excuse.

IX.

And thou, stony grot, in thy arch may'st preserve
Two lingering drops of the night-fallen dew ;
And just let them fall at her feet, and they'll serve
As tears of my sorrow intrusted to you.

X.

Or, lest they unheeded should fall at her feet,
Let them fall on her bosom of snow ; and I swear
The next time I visit thy moss-cover'd seat,
I'll pay thee each drop with a genuine tear.

XI.

So may'st thou, green willow, for ages thus toss
Thy branches so lank o'er the slow winding stream ;
And thou, stony grotto, retain all thy moss,
While yet there's a poet to make thee his theme.

XII.

Nay, more—may my Delia still give you her charms
Each ev'ning, and sometimes the whole ev'ning long ;
Then, grotto, be proud, to support her white arms,
Then, willow, wave all thy green tops to her song.

Criticism would be ill employed in an examination of stanzas which were written on the

impulse of the moment, and have little to recommend them beyond the minuteness of local painting and the measured harmony of the verse, corresponding with the author's feelings, and the scenery which he has described.

The little bickerings of love, by which courtship is rather accelerated than retarded, pass quickly over, are again renewed, and as often subside, leaving the affections on both sides more tender, and uniting them more closely to each other.

So it proved in this case; for whatever trifling differences the behaviour of Sheridan might occasion, they were soon removed by the pleasantry of his manners, the influence of his wit, and the occasional flattery of his muse.

The season of love, like that of the spring, is propitious to poetical genius; and as in the one every flower gives more delight when its fragrance is combined with elegance of form and vivid beauty of colour; so when the breathings of affection are expressed in harmonious numbers, and clothed with the richness of metaphor, they are certain of giving pleasure to the female object of adoration. Even the extravagance of hyperbolical adulation, and the absurdity of allegorical comparison, will, in such cases, be received as pure incense, of which these lines, descriptive of the personal charms of Miss Linley, afford a striking evidence:—

Mark'd you her eyes of heavenly blue ;
Mark'd you her cheeks of roseate hue ;
Those eyes in liquid circles moving ;
Those cheeks abash'd at man's approving ;
The one love's arrows darting round,
The other blushing at the wound.

By these assiduous attentions, Mr. Richard Sheridan completely triumphed over all his rivals ; and his brother, finding that his cause was hopeless, had the fortitude to relinquish his pursuit, without manifesting any enmity on his disappointment. The father, however, of Mr. Sheridan was inexorably adverse to the match, but for what reason it would be difficult to guess, since it must be admitted that the rational ground of objection lay solely on the other side. Mr. Linley had carefully educated his daughter, and brought her forward in public life, with an assurance that her commanding talents, independently of her personal charms, must, in no great length of time, realize a fortune. Sheridan, on the contrary, had neither a shilling that he could call his own, nor a profession by which he might expect to rise in the world. His father had great difficulty to rear up his family : and when they were advanced to maturity, they still lay as a burthen upon his hands. They kept, it is true, the best company at Bath, which being the resort of the fashionable and the idle, the gay and the wealthy, of both sexes, held out many powerful inducements to accom-

plished men without income, by promising them an advantageous settlement in marriage, or an easy maintenance by gaming. On what principles Mr. Thomas Sheridan opposed the marriage of his son and Miss Linley can hardly be surmised, since the fact of her being a public singer at concerts and oratorios was to the full as honourable as that of his exhibiting Charles Francis Sheridan in the character of an orator at the age of twelve, or his own repeated performances upon the English and Irish stages. If his resistance proceeded from the consciousness that his son wanted the means to provide for a family, the blame chiefly recoiled upon himself in having neglected to cultivate the fine talents of the youth by such an application as would have rendered him independent. It has been said that "love is an idle man's business;" but though in such cases it may be pursued with great alacrity and romantic perseverance, it is seldom productive of happiness, because when the motive has ceased, idleness still remains with its usual consequences, unless the moral spring is properly directed by some honourable employment.

On the departure of old Mr. Sheridan for Ireland, his youngest son seized the opportunity of persuading Miss Linley to elope with him to the continent; but finding there was an obstacle to their marriage in France, he had the prudence to place his mistress in one of the convents, which

admitted boarders, without any objection to their religious sentiments. Here she was found by her father, and conveyed to England, followed by her lover, who had an immediate occasion to vindicate the young lady's reputation, as well as his own honour, in consequence of evil reports that had been industriously circulated, and even printed, during their absence.

When the flight took place, it naturally became the subject of general conversation at Bath, where, from the known intimacy that had subsisted between Matthews and Sheridan, and from a variety of circumstances, it was freely said that the former must have been concerned in the elopement. The conjecture was perfectly natural and well-founded; but Matthews thought proper to deny all knowledge of the transaction; and he went so far as to throw out reflections injurious to the reputation of Miss Linley and her lover. The matter found its way into the newspapers; and the Bath Herald contained some animadversions upon the fugitives, which excited much attention, as evidently coming from the pen of one who must have been well acquainted with their affairs and former history. Sheridan could not long be ignorant of these dastardly attempts to injure his honour, and to destroy the peace of one who had a claim upon him for the protection of her character. Having traced with certainty the calumny, which had been so scan-

dalously propagated, to the original author, our hero instantly proceeded to Bath; but his arrival there was no sooner known, than Matthews thought it most expedient to decamp for London, where he was as closely pursued by the man whom he had betrayed and abused. He was discovered in a tavern at the corner of Henrietta Street and Bedford Street, Covent Garden; and the parties being resolutely bent, they both drew their swords, while Mr. Charles Sheridan alone acted as the second in the fray. The rencontre was desperate, for each was a complete master of the weapon; but after a display of much courage and skill, Matthews was disarmed, and thrown upon the floor, in which situation he sued for his life. In addition to this, he signed a confession of the falsehoods which he had caused to be circulated; and this declaration was immediately published in the journal where the original paragraphs from the same hand had appeared. The vanquished party, being thus completely covered with disgrace, retired to his estate in Glamorganshire; but even there he could not be free from the observations of his neighbours, for the whole story quickly spread throughout the kingdom, especially as the duel was one out of the ordinary practice of single combat in this country.

Stung by the sarcasms of his old companions, and irritated at being thrown out of the gay circle where he had been considered as a leader, Matthews

became almost frantic with rage ; and though conscience told him that the blood of another could not obliterate the signature which he had affixed to his own confession of treachery, he resolved to perish in the attempt to get revenge. Accordingly, he returned once more to Bath, and immediately caused a message to be delivered to Sheridan, demanding another meeting. This the latter might have declined by all the rules of duelling, and upon every principle of strict honour ; for his antagonist, having already, when defeated, obtained the grant of his life upon a condition that fixed upon him a mark of odium, had no right to the interview which he now sought. But though the friends whom Mr. Sheridan consulted on this occasion remonstrated in strong terms, and with conclusive arguments, on the impropriety of complying with the requisition, his lofty spirit could not brook the idea of sheltering himself from a conflict under any plea whatever. It was accordingly settled that the parties should meet at four in the morning on Kingsdown near Bath, each attended by his second, who were however peremptorily interdicted from interfering their offices during the contest. Punctually, at the time appointed, the combatants appeared on the ground ; and after a discharge of pistols, neither of which took effect, they drew their swords. The onset was most desperate, and plainly indicated a fierce

resolution on both sides to carry matters to the last extremity. Sheridan, indeed, endeavoured to disarm his adversary, as he had done before; but in this he was foiled by the address of Matthews, and they closed. The struggle was now most desperate, and betrayed uncommon strength of muscular power, with mental energy, passion, and skill. After inflicting some severe wounds, they came to the ground, and in the fall both their swords were broken. Matthews having now greatly the advantage by being uppermost, pressed hard upon Sheridan, and exultingly demanded whether he would beg his life; to which he received for answer, that "he scorned it;" and the conflict was renewed even in that awkward situation with all the fury that had marked it from the commencement.

They mangled each other for some time with their broken swords: the point of that of Matthews remained sticking partly in the cheek and ear of Sheridan, who, being at length completely exhausted with the loss of blood, fainted upon the spot, in which situation he was removed to a chaise and conveyed to Bath, Matthews and his friend at the same time setting off in another for London. Thus ended this memorable duel, which in many particulars, though happily not in the result, very nearly resembled the deadly one between Sir Edward Sackville and Lord Bruce, in the reign

of James the First, as described by the survivor in a curious letter, of which a copy is inserted in one of the numbers of the Guardian.

Mr. Sheridan's wounds were serious, but not fatal, and in consequence of them he was obliged to keep his bed some weeks, during some part of which time he was kept by his medical attendants in a quiet state, without being visited by any of his friends. Miss Linley was uncommonly afflicted by what had happened, and her distress was aggravated in being prevented from seeing him, though she even begged that favour "as a wife." They were not, however, at this time actually married, but the vows which they had interchanged were considered by each as equally binding with a more formal obligation. The heroism displayed on the late occasion could not fail to endear Miss Linley to her lover; but her attachment was, if possible, rendered more ardent by the opposition to the union still kept up by her friends. They pleaded, and no doubt with great plausibility, that as Mr. Sheridan had neither a fortune, calling, nor expectancy, whatever might be his merits and talents, marriage with him must be attended with trouble and misery. To remove this obstacle, Mr. Sheridan declared his intention of following the law, in which profession it was natural to expect that his ability would be distinguished by great practice and high promotion. With this view, he was entered a member of the

Middle Temple on the sixth of April, 1773, and admitted into commons in Hilary Term the following year. Having, in some degree, thus overcome the objections that were made to his pretensions, the consent of the Linley family was obtained to an alliance which they were aware must eventually take place, and accordingly the young couple were united by license on the thirteenth of April, 1773, he being in his twenty-second and she in her nineteenth year.

Shortly after their marriage, the following poetical correspondence passed between Mr. Sheridan and his lady, in consequence of a gentle suspicion expressed by the latter that the want of stability in his disposition would mar their happiness.

DAMON TO DELIA.

I.

Ask'st thou "how long my love shall stay,

"When all that's new is past?"

How long?—Ah, Delia, can I say

How long my life will last?

Dry be that tear—be hush'd that sigh;

At least, I'll love thee till I die!

II.

And does that thought afflict thee too,

The thought of Damon's death?

That he who only lives for you,

Must yield his faithful breath?

Hush'd be that sigh, be dry that tear,

Nor let us lose our Heaven here.

DELIA TO DAMON.

I.

Think'st thou, my Damon, I'd forego
This tender luxury of woe,
Which better than the tongue imparts
The feelings of impassion'd hearts?
Blest, if my sighs and tears but prove
The winds and waves that waft to love.

II.

Can true affection cease to fear?
Poor is the joy not worth a tear!
Did passion ever know content?
How weak the rapture words can paint!
Then let my sighs and tears but prove
The winds and waves that waft to love.

III.

The Cyprian bird, with plaintive moan,
Thus makes her faithful passion known;
So Zephyrus breathes on Flora's bowers,
And charms with sighs the queen of flowers!
Then let my sighs and tears but prove
The winds and waves that waft to love.

CHAPTER II.

Retirement of Mrs. Sheridan from public Exhibition.—Anecdote.—Observation of Dr. Johnson.—Embarrassments.—Private Concerts.—Comedy of the Rivals.—Farce of St. Patrick's Day.—Opera of the Duenna.—Abdication of Garrick.—Succeeded by Sheridan.

AT the time when this marriage took place, Mrs. Sheridan was under an engagement to sing for the benefit of the three choirs, at their musical meeting, which was that year to be held at Worcester. On this occasion she had been paid before-hand: but such was the pride of her husband, that he insisted upon having the money returned, accompanied by a declaration that Mrs. Sheridan would not appear any more in public as a singer. The intimation very naturally astonished the directors, and they strongly represented the great loss which the charity must sustain in the absence of one upon whose powerful attractions they had relied as certain of drawing a crowded assembly. In addition to this unanswerable appeal, they remonstrated with no less energy, though in delicate terms, upon the justifiable grounds of complaint which the subscribers would have to make upon a dereliction that did not originate in absolute necessity. This argument



Mrs Elizabeth Sheridan.

Engraved by H. Meyer from a Drawing by Elias Humphrey, R.A.

had its effect, and the lady went down to Worcester, where she enraptured crowded audiences by her harmonious strains; the delight of which, however, was allayed by the painful reflection that they would never more be repeated. When the meeting was over, she acted with great liberality, by putting the money that had been paid to her into the plate.

From this period, Mrs. Sheridan ceased entirely to display her rich musical talents and commanding vocal powers in public: though not without much reluctance on her part, and dissatisfaction on that of her family. Offers to a considerable amount were made from various quarters to engage her services, but to all of them the most determined and indignant refusal was given by her husband, who went so far as to treat some of the applications with unbecoming rudeness. About this time the Pantheon in Oxford-street was preparing for musical entertainments upon an elegant plan; and the proprietors, being desirous of securing the first-rate performers, tendered Mrs. Sheridan one thousand pounds for twelve nights, with an additional sum to the same amount for a benefit; and these terms to be continued for seven years. Even this liberal proposal was rejected with disdain by her husband, who carried his high notions so far as to prevent his wife from singing at a royal concert, alleging that such an exhibition would degrade his character as a gentleman. Yet at this very moment the father of Mr. Sheridan

was an itinerant lecturer and actor; while the family of the lady were living in great credit by the exertion of their musical abilities.

This spirit of pride, without the means of supporting it, or any certainty of living in a state of independence, soon became the subject of general conversation and censure. It was observed, and justly, that Sheridan having no property of his own, nor any calling by which he could maintain a family, exerted an arbitrary authority in restraining his wife from following the occupation to which she had been bred, and by which she could not fail, in a few years, to realize a fortune. On the other hand, a few persons attempted his vindication, as being actuated by delicate feeling, and virtuous intrepidity. Among these was Dr. Johnson, of whose reasoning upon this occasion his biographer has given the following statement, without mentioning the names of the parties, both of whom were living at the time of his publication. "We talked," says Boswell, "of a young gentleman's marriage with an eminent singer, and his determination that she should no longer sing in public, though his father was very earnest she should, because her talents would be liberally rewarded, so as to make her a good fortune. It was questioned whether the young gentleman, who had not a shilling in the world, but was blest with very uncommon talents, was not foolishly delicate, or foolishly proud, and his father truly rational, without being mean. Johnson, with all the high spirit of a

Roman senator, exclaimed, ‘ He resolved wisely and nobly, to be sure. He is a brave man. Would not a gentleman be disgraced by having his wife sing publicly for hire? No, Sir, there can be no doubt here. I know not if I should not *prepare* myself for a public singer, as readily as let my wife be one.’”

But with all due deference to the great moralist, his decree in this instance was dogmatical without argument; or, at least, the ground assigned for the objection is fallacious. It should have been remembered that the lady was a singer at oratorios and public concerts when Sheridan succeeded in gaining her affections; and he never intimated his resolution of withdrawing her from that pursuit till after their marriage. The interdiction was totally unexpected by her friends, who considered it as an act of severity and insult on the part of a man who could neither boast of pedigree, nor property. Even Mrs. Sheridan was anxious to secure an income by her vocal powers; and she earnestly intreated her husband to relax from his opposition, so far as to allow of her occasional performance, until their circumstances should render it unnecessary. But he still continued inflexible, though it was with great difficulty he could raise the necessary supplies for the ordinary purposes of life, and that by very equivocal means. One of his resources was that of writing for the fugitive publications of the

day, in which he was materially assisted by his wife: and many years after his entrance into the sphere of politics, he has been heard to say, that "if he had stuck to the law, he believed he should have done as much as his friend, Tom Erskine; but," continued he, "I had no time for such studies. Mrs. Sheridan and myself were often obliged to keep writing for our daily leg or shoulder of mutton, otherwise we should have had no dinner." One of his friends, to whom he confessed this, wittily replied, "Then, I perceive, it was a *joint concern*."

At length the lofty sentiments of Mr. Sheridan yielded somewhat under the pressure of necessity, and to the influence of expediency. Though he continued to reject all the overtures that were made for the public appearance of his wife, he readily suffered her to have private concerts, if they could properly be so denominated, by which it is probable more was obtained than could have been received in the display of her skill and melody at places of general admission. Thus the same thing was practised with a finer name; for whatever distinction an air of fashion might have given to these concerts, the subscription by which they were supported was in reality the price given for an entertainment. The income thus obtained at London and Bath was very handsome, but it could not keep pace with the profusion of Mr. Sheridan, whose chief ambition appeared to lie in maintaining a splendid establishment, and seeing

what is called good company. His own wit, and the accomplishments of his wife, were sufficient attractions to draw numerous visitors, who went away charmed with the pleasure they had enjoyed, and returned with new admirers of rank and consequence. Expenses were hereby multiplied far beyond the means of discharging them, and yet it has been loosely asserted, that at this period of his life Mr. Sheridan was sedulously employed in literary pursuits for the support of a rising family. His capacity for such undertakings cannot be denied, but the will was wanting; and the revelry in which he indulged left little or no time for diligent application.

He was nominally a member of the Society of the Middle Temple, where he was admitted into Commons in Hilary Term in the year 1774; but it is much to be questioned whether at any time he entertained serious notions of following the law as a profession; and it is certain that he never was called to the bar. The theatre, and other places of public entertainment, yielded more gratification to him than Westminster Hall; and instead of reading Coke upon Littleton, with the Corpus Juris Civilis, by which he might have gained a comprehensive knowledge of English law, and its connexion with universal jurisprudence, he devoted his time to pleasure and the muses. Unlike Blackstone, who indulged a taste for poetry, till it became necessary to make a prudent sacrifice

of inclination for the sake of permanent benefit, Mr. Sheridan neglected the calling in which he might have shone unrivalled, and have acquired both affluence and honour, to follow amusement as the business of life.

On the seventeenth of January, 1775, his comedy of the RIVALS was brought forward at Covent-Garden Theatre; but owing to the bad performance of the Irish character, and some prolixities in other parts, the piece met with a very indifferent reception, in consequence of which it was withdrawn by the author, for the purpose of making some alterations; and on its second appearance, the public approbation was marked by general and repeated plaudits.

The outlines of this play will be found to correspond with the history of Mr. Sheridan's marriage; and the characters are for the most part the same with those that had before been dramatized in a ludicrous manner by Foote in his "Maid of Bath." One of the personages in the comedy, however, is a palpable copy from an original in the novel of Joseph Andrews. But the delineation of a conceited waiting-woman, who affects superiority of mental endowments, by using hard words in a misapplied sense, while it gives inimitable humour to the story of Fielding, becomes extravagantly absurd in the comedy of Sheridan. Slipslop in the novel is just such an affected character as might be found in her situa-

tion of life, at any period; but it is ridiculous to suppose that a lady of family and fortune, residing at Bath in the eighteenth century, could be so grossly ignorant as Mrs. Malaprop is described in every sentence that she utters. For instance, she is introduced as giving her opinion upon female education, and saying, that “Greek and Hebrew, Algebra, and *Simony*, are *inflammatory* branches of learning, with which a young woman ought by no means to be acquainted, while it is proper that she should have a *supercilious* knowledge in accounts; and as she grows up be instructed in *geometry*, that she may know something of the *contagious* countries; but above all she should be mistress of *orthodoxy*, that she may not misspell, or mispronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do; and likewise that she may *reprehend* the true meaning of what she is saying.”

That the author might have had some particular person in view at the time when he sketched this outrageous caricature is extremely probable, but he has violated all probability in representing such a contemptible compound of ignorance and vanity as a woman of family and fortune. The character of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, an Irish adventurer, who is ready to fight any body, with or without a reason, is happily conceived, and forcibly drawn. The failure of Mr. Lee in this part is said to have occasioned the bad success of the play on the first night of its performance; and to the excellent acting of it

by Mr. Clinch, the author considered himself as so much indebted, that he presented him soon after with a farce for his benefit, entitled “St. Patrick’s Day, or the Scheming Lieutenant.” This trifling piece has some broad strokes of humour, but upon the whole, if it detracts not from the reputation of Sheridan as a comic writer, it certainly never can be adduced as an evidence of his genius.

At the opening of the ensuing season the *Duenna* was brought out on the same stage, with rapturous applause, which increased at every repetition during seventy-five nights, being ten more than the number of nights on which the celebrated opera of Gay was exhibited in the first run of the performance.

This comic opera, by Sheridan, is a very lively and bustling piece, but the general outline of the plot is not new, being an exact copy of the “Country Wife,” by Wycherly. The principal incidents in the *Duenna* are in direct violation of all probability; for it is utterly incredible that a Spanish nobleman, of ancient pedigree, and considerable estate, should dispose of his daughter to a commercial Jew, recently baptized, and who has nothing but his wealth to recommend him. Yet the scene of this inconsistency is laid in Seville, the seat of the Inquisition, and in a family of the first consequence. Had the author transferred his adventure to Amsterdam, and described the father of the young lady as a penurious burgomaster, there

would have been less objection to the story : but as it stands, the warmest admirers of the opera must allow that it is completely at variance with the pride and superstition of the Spanish character. The imposition practised upon the sordid lover is whimsical, and constitutes the principal feature of the piece; yet this also is liable to the same charge of being in every respect unnatural. That a man, hackneyed in the ways of the world, should mistake an old woman, who, by his own observation, reminded him of his mother, for the daughter of his friend, and accede to her proposal of elopement, is one of those extravagancies which may perhaps find a parallel in the modern drama, but which never could have been realized in any society. The dialogue is easy, and conducted with that quickness of reciprocity which is characteristic of true conversation; but it is somewhat remarkable that there is little wit interspersed, even where such sallies might have been most expected. The spectator is excited to laughter more by the equivocal situations of the parties, and their respective blunders, than by the singularity of their conduct, or the humour of their language. The picture of a monastic refectory is amusing, but it is excessively overcharged, and abruptly introduced without any necessary connexion with the plot; and certainly it is not calculated to recommend religion or morality. Whatever may be our ideas of cloistered superstition, and of the abuses which have

crept into institutions set apart for the purposes of study and devotion, it should be remembered that the conventual seclusion has been the means of preserving learning and of encouraging hospitality. The balance of good produced by these venerable foundations so far outweighs their temporary and local evils, that the liberal observer of men and manners will be inclined to resent any public ridicule thrown upon them as an ungrateful return for the benefits which we still derive from these memorials of ancient piety. This episode of the priory seems to have been thrust in by the author merely to create some diversion for the support of the piece; but the object is obtained at the risk of endangering the principles of virtue, by making the profession of religion a cloak for intemperance, and shewing that ebriety is practised most where the obligation of abstinence is the strongest. The merriment excited by viewing this scene is congenial with that displayed by Father Paul and his companions, on the stage, whose licentiousness is not censured, though their hypocrisy is made conspicuous.

The reputation of Sheridan, as a dramatic writer, was now completely established; but it was archly observed, at the time, in some of the papers, that "he and Anne Catley, the celebrated singer, constituted the chief strength of Covent Garden."

One of the earliest friends of Mr. Sheridan was

Garrick, who introduced him to Sir Joshua Reynolds, at whose sociable table he frequently met, among a variety of literary characters, Goldsmith, Burke, and Dr. Johnson. The latter was very much pleased with the brilliancy of his conversation; and after the appearance of the *Duenna*, he proposed him as a member of the literary club, into which he was elected the same year. It was about this time that Johnson wrote his Latin inscription for the monument of Goldsmith, which produced a remonstrance or address, in the form of a round robin, requesting the doctor to substitute for it an epitaph in English. This measure originated in a conversation after dinner, at the house of Sir Joshua Reynolds, when the doctor was not present; and the address being drawn up in due form, was circumscribed by all the parties present, with the exception of Bennet Langton, who either had too great a respect for the judgment of Johnson, or partiality to classical language in public inscriptions, to join in such an application. The others were Sir Joshua Reynolds, Sir William Forbes, Dr. Barnard, Dean of Derry, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Philip Metcalfe, Edward Gibbon, Dr. Joseph Warton, Edmund Burke, Dr. Thomas Franklin, Anthony Chamier, George Coleman, and William Vachell.

This association affords a plain testimony of the esteem in which Mr. Sheridan was then held; and about the same time he obtained a substantial proof of the high opinion entertained of him by

Mr. Garrick. That great performer had often mentioned his design of relinquishing the stage altogether; but the love of a profession, at the head of which he had stood so long, mixed with no small portion of natural vanity, kept him from carrying that resolution into effect; and it was little expected, at the beginning of 1776, when he caused several improvements to be made in his theatre. These alterations, which took place under his own inspection, seemed to indicate his longer continuance both as actor and manager, when a sudden rumour obtained circulation that a revolution was about to take place in the management of Drury Lane Theatre. The reasons publicly assigned for this measure were the decline of health, and an inability to endure any longer the fatigue of so laborious a concern. By those, however, who were intimately acquainted with the interior state of that house, other causes were alleged for the resolution which Mr. Garrick had taken of relinquishing a favourite station; and they scrupled not to say that, as he could no longer enforce his regulations, nor repress cabals among the performers, he very wisely thought it most prudent to delegate his power into other hands. Whatever might be the inducements to this complete secession from the stage, the determination no sooner became known than numerous applications were made for the purchase; and from the turn which the negotiation took, it is evident that Mr.

Garrick, while he gave up the establishment in form, still contrived to retain some influence in its direction. In the month of June, 1776, the settlement, which had been some time under discussion, was finally agreed upon for the purchase of the half of the entire property, by Messrs. James Ford, Thomas Linley, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, in the following proportions;—Mr. Ford's share to be three-sevenths, amounting to £15,000.; Mr. Linley's and Mr. Sheridan's two-sevenths each, at the price of £10,000. for each share, thus making for the whole purchase of Mr. Garrick's moiety the sum of thirty-five thousand pounds.

Much wonder was expressed when the terms of this agreement were made known, at the circumstance that so young a man as Mr. Sheridan, without any fortune whatever, should be able to find means of becoming a partner in this extensive concern. But it appears that Mr. Ford and Mr. Albany Wallis assisted Mr. Sheridan in the purchase of his two-sevenths, as a mortgage to the first of these gentlemen for the sum of seven thousand seven hundred pounds, and another to the latter for one thousand pounds, were entered as Mr. Sheridan's share of the theatre.

When it is considered that Mr. Wallis was the confidential agent of Mr. Garrick, and that Mr. Ford stood on terms of the greatest intimacy with him, some foundation is afforded to substantiate what was said at the time, that Mr. Sheridan was

indebted to the generosity of his friend and predecessor for the interest which he obtained in the concern of Drury Lane, no less than for the appointment of manager.

Mr. Garrick still retained an affection for the stage, which he had adorned so many years; and the stake that he still held in the theatre naturally made him desirous of contributing efficient assistance to Mr. Sheridan in the important department which he had undertaken. The sound judgment and long experience of Garrick abundantly qualified him to guide an inexperienced young man in the formal business of the theatre, as well as in the selection and adaptation of dramatic pieces for the gratification of the public. It may naturally be supposed that, independently of the duty arising from the sense of obligation for many essential favours, Mr. Sheridan gladly attended to the judicious counsels of his valuable instructor, for the sake of giving satisfaction to the performers and the audience. He accordingly spent much of his time with Mr. Garrick, both at his house in the Adelphi and at Hampton, which opportunities he sedulously employed in profiting by the information which that veteran of the drama was enabled to impart. Mr. Sheridan, under the superintendence of this excellent Mentor, made such alterations in the comedies of the *Old Bachelor*, the *Way of the World*, and *Love for Love*, by expurgating several licentious speeches,

and introducing some corrections in the language and sentiment, as rendered these sterling pieces extremely popular and useful upon their revival.

The conduct of Mr. Garrick, throughout the whole of this concern, was the more liberal, as he had sufficient reason to complain of the father of Mr. Sheridan, who affected, on all occasions, a superiority over the English Roscius, not only as a man of letters, but as a tragedian. Whenever he had an opportunity, he always selected some one of those characters in which Garrick was pre-eminent, and this he did purposely to display his judgment and erudition, by way of contrast to those extraordinary powers which never failed to enrap-ture an audience. But after all, old Mr. Sheridan could never succeed in persuading the public that art was more pleasing than nature; and his irritable spirit was so lacerated by the neglect with which he was treated as to vent most contemptuous language upon the favourite performer and his admirers. This acerbity of disposition increased with his years, and was rendered more vexatious to himself and disagreeable to others by the slight put upon his schemes of improvement. Among those who treated his boasted plans with ridicule were Johnson and Garrick; and in return, Sheridan scrupled not to call the first a pedant, and the last a buffoon.

Dr. Johnson made overtures for a renewal of that intimacy which had formerly subsisted between

him and Sheridan, but they were most ungraciously repelled; and one day, when the doctor was engaged to dine with Mr. Dilly, the bookseller, Sheridan, who was also invited, left the house immediately on hearing into whose company he was about to be ushered.

The haughty demeanour and uncivil behaviour of the father, however, did not prove disadvantageous to the son, though many persons of less vanity than Garrick, or quickness of resentment than Johnson, would have thought themselves fully warranted in treating the whole family with distant reserve after having been so uncourteously used.

Young Mr. Sheridan, indeed, was of a very different temperament from his father in this respect, and he did not even scruple to laugh at his pertinacious attachment to an ideal system which had absorbed his time and attention, without producing any public benefit or private emolument. He ingratiated himself into the favour of Garrick by deferring to his opinion implicitly in all matters which he conceived to be proper for the management of the theatre. Nor was he less assiduous in his attentions to the great critic and moralist, who presided at the literary club, and who did him the distinguished honour of proposing him as a member of that celebrated society. In return for this flattering kindness, Mr. Sheridan, unmindful of his father's inflexible hostility to that wonderful man, was anxious to preserve his esteem by feeling in-

terested in his conversation, and shewing a becoming deference to his judgment. An opportunity occurred about this time of paying in public an elegant compliment to the Nestor of English literature, in a prologue to the altered play of Sir Thomas Overbury, by Savage, then brought out at Covent Garden; at the close of which, Sheridan, in allusion to Johnson's inimitable life of the unfortunate author, says,

“ So pleads the tale, that gives to future times
The son's misfortunes, and the parent's crimes;
There shall his fame, if own'd to night, survive;
Fix'd by the hand that bids our language live.”

CHAPTER III.

Management of the Theatre.—Additions to the Tempest of Shakspeare.—Comedy of the Relapse altered, with the Title of the Trip to Scarborough.—Success of the Comedy of the School for Scandal.—Anecdote of Garrick.—Observations on that Play.—Opinion of Mr. Cumberland.—Traditionary Doubts concerning the Origin of the Comedy.

THE abdication of Mr. Garrick, and the accession of Mr. Sheridan to the administration of the government of Drury Lane, occasioned a variety of opinions among the admirers of the drama, many considering the change as auspicious to genius, while others were apprehensive that, whatever might be the natural abilities and disposition of the young manager, he wanted a knowledge of business and an industrious spirit to render him an efficient substitute for his accomplished predecessor.

By his constant application to the minutest affairs, Garrick gained general respect, and his studied care to meet the wishes of the town, every season rendered him deservedly popular. Complaints were indeed sometimes uttered against him by disappointed authors and refractory actors, but he contrived to keep them from

inflaming the public mind; and though differences occasionally arose between him and Mr. Lacy, his partner, as well as with the performers, prudence taught him to confine the disputes to those who were directly concerned, by which means, with temperate conciliation, they usually died away, and the manager had credit for more effective authority than he really possessed. The new proprietors did not preserve the same appearance of unanimity, and the contentions among them, even at the opening of the winter season in 1776, became the subject of general conversation, which served to confirm the fears of those who most regretted the separation of Mr. Garrick from that establishment. Nor were the admirers of Mr. Sheridan much better pleased when they found nothing but old pieces brought forward, and that without much attraction in the representation. The principal of these was the *Tempest*, with some of the additions of Dryden, and a few songs from the pen of Mr. Sheridan, composed by Mr. Thomas Linley, his brother-in-law. Still, as the public had been led to expect something original from the author of the *Rivals* and the *Duenna*, this sublime production of Shakspeare, though set off by very excellent scenery and music, did not give the desired satisfaction. Another revival and alteration by Mr. Sheridan, in the same season, was not better adapted to allay the popular discontent, or to re-

concile the lovers of the drama to the new management. This was an attempt to make the licentious, but witty, comedy of the "Relapse," passable in an age of refinement, under the title of "A Trip to Scarborough." The original play is well known to have been written as a continuation of Cibber's comedy of "Love's Last Shift;" and nothing but its humour, spirit, and strength of character, could have given it currency even at that period when the immorality of the stage was publicly vindicated against the powerful attack of the zealous and learned Jeremy Collier.

What could induce Mr. Sheridan to draw this indecent production of Sir John Vanbrugh's fertile muse from oblivion, is difficult to guess; but the most extraordinary thing of all, is the fact, that in adapting the old play to modern taste, he omitted all the wit which seasoned the Relapse, and substituted nothing of his own, in the Trip to Scarborough, as an equivalent. Great opposition was made to the play, and even some of the persons who were engaged in its representation contributed to increase this dislike by the manner of their performance. But the cabals of the actors, and their endeavour to depress what it was their duty to enliven, as the servants of the house and the public, gave so much offence to the audience on the second exhibition of the piece, that loud resentment was expressed against their conduct,

which made them more cautious, and the comedy on the third night was both well played and well received.

But the gloomy cloud that had been spread over old Drury through a great part of the season suddenly dispersed at the close, and the comic muse surprised the world with a production which gave universal delight, and went far beyond the expectations of those who had formed the highest estimate of the genius of Mr. Sheridan.

The comedy of "the School for Scandal" was performed, for the first time, on the eighth of May, and its effect upon the public exceeded that of the Duenna, though the season was then at the close. It was indebted to the judgment of Garrick for some slight touches, with a prologue, and to the best actors of the day for their exertions; but its intrinsic merit could not fail to insure success, of which its continued power of pleasing is an established proof. Of this piece, and the opinion entertained of it by Garrick, we have a story told by Mr. Murphy, in his life of that great performer, to the following effect. "The School for Scandal was presented at Drury Lane, in the beginning of May; and there again we find that Garrick was still at work. His muse furnished the prologue to that excellent comedy. Mr. Sheridan wished to have the opinion of so able a judge. Garrick read the play with close attention, and spoke of it in all companies with the highest ap-

probation. He attended the rehearsals, and was never known, on any former occasion, to be more anxious for a favourite piece.

“He was proud of the new manager, and, in a triumphant manner, boasted of the genius to whom he had consigned the conduct of the theatre. Amidst the praise which he bestowed on Mr. Sheridan’s performance, a gentleman said to him, “This is but a single play, and, at the long-run, will be but a slender help to support a theatre. To you, Mr. Garrick, I must say, the Atlas that propped the stage has left his station.” “Has he?” said Garrick: “if that be the case, he has found another Hercules to succeed to the office.” He augured the best from a genius that began in so auspicious a manner. “It is to be regretted,” continues the complaisant biographer, “that his prediction has not been fulfilled. A few more such productions would, with propriety, have fixed on Mr. Sheridan the title of our modern Congreve.”*

This celebrated comedy has the peculiar merit of charming the audience, without possessing any thing like a regular plot, or such a connected story as keeps up the attention of the spectator to the end of a dramatic representation in constant expectation of the result. But here no such curiosity is awakened, and yet we are carried on from

* Murphy’s Life of Garrick, vol. ii. p. 145.

one scene to another with increasing pleasure. An immediate interest is created at the opening, which continues to the end, without any suspension of thought or conjectural solicitude as to the fortune of any of the parties. The two brothers are palpable imitations of the principal characters in Fielding's best novel: but the hypocritical baseness of Blifil, cool, thoughtful, and plotting, in all his measures, is much more consistent than the sentimental refinement of Joseph Surface, who endeavours to draw Lady Teazle from virtue by logic and philosophy. In that very scene, upon which the whole piece is made to turn, this formal dealer in apophthegms and sententious morality lays siege to the wife of his friend dialectically in mood and figure, when he is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of Sir Peter; and the lady, for security, is placed behind a screen, though there is a closet in the same room. But this screen constitutes the *sine qua non* of the whole play, for without it, hypocrisy would not be unmasked, nor reformation effected. Improbable, however, as this incident is, it answers the purpose for which the author designed it, by exhibiting to the delighted audience a group of personages actuated at the moment by very different feelings. So far the contrivance is good, but it is the study of the desk and not the casual occurrence of real life. No man in the embarrassed state of Joseph, and with his supposed cunning,

would act so incautiously as to place a lady of that importance in a situation where she could hardly escape discovery.

Mr. Cumberland, however, has vindicated such expedients upon the stage in a very ingenious manner, and he has justified them by adducing this very play, of which he says, "I could name one, now living, who has made such happy use of his screen in a comedy of the very first merit, that if Aristotle himself had written a whole chapter professedly against screens, and Jerry Collier had edited it, with notes and illustrations, I would not have placed Lady Teazle out of earshot to have saved their ears from the pillory; but if either of these worthies could have pointed out an expedient to have got Joseph Surface off the stage, pending that scene, with any reasonable conformity to nature, they would have done more good to the drama than either of them have done harm; and that is saying a great deal."*

Yet, with all respect to so good a judge of stage effect, and the license of dramatic poetry, it may fairly admit of a doubt whether a scene of this improbable description can be considered as coming within the exact limits of comedy. It has all the appearance of artful contrivance in the author, to bring about the scheme which he has in view, when his genius is unable to accomplish his

* Cumberland's Memoirs, 4to. p. 224.

purpose in any other way. We are amused, indeed, at the equivocal contrast of the characters, their mutual embarrassment and surprise; but so we should were the same exhibition to pass before us in a pantomime or a farce.

The moral tendency of the *School for Scandal* is that part upon which its greatest admirers will find it difficult to say any thing conclusive and satisfactory. By enjoying the thoughtless levity of an extravagant young rake, and laughing at the starched formality and sober maxims of his brother, the gay and inexperienced will stand a pretty good chance of preferring for their companions characters resembling the first; and of treating the serious and studious as persons who cover knavish principles with the garb of decency like Joseph Surface.

The production of this comedy upon the stage of Drury Lane elevated Mr. Sheridan in the public esteem as the first dramatic writer of his day, and he was complimented with the appellation of being the younger Congreve.

But while the superlative excellence of this play, as a composition, was universally admitted, there were not wanting some acute critics who analyzed it with severity, as being rather an effusion of the imagination than a picture of life and manners. Others again had no scruple in hazarding an opinion that the comedy was not the performance of Sheridan, and what was at first merely

suspicion, gathered into the substantial form of positive assertion. By some it was attributed to the pen of Mrs. Sheridan; and there were persons who roundly asserted that the play was written by a young lady, the daughter of a merchant in Thames Street; that, at the beginning of the season, when Mr. Sheridan commenced his management, the manuscript was put into his hands for his judgment, soon after which, the fair writer, who was then in a state of decline, went to Bristol Hot-Wells, where she died. Such was the rumour, which so far obtained credit, that Mr. Isaac Reed, a man extremely cautious of giving publicity to loose reports, thought it proper to insert this story in the account which he gave of the play in his edition of the *Biographia Dramatica*. Very observable it is, that, notwithstanding the general circulation of a charge, which, if true, must materially injure the moral and literary reputation of Sheridan, he never took the pains of repelling it, or of establishing his right to the brightest performance that bears his name. It certainly is not a little extraordinary, that, while the other dramatic pieces of Mr. Sheridan have been committed to the press by his authority, and for his emolument, that which exceeds them all, and has brought most honour to his name, still remains unpublished, except in surreptitious editions. This could not have arisen from any reluctance to appear in print, for advantage was taken of the

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extreme popularity of the Critic, and particularly of Pizarro, to profit by the sale of the copies. That this has never yet been done with respect to the manuscript of the School for Scandal, is a mystery which cannot easily be explained on the assumption that it really was the legitimate offspring of his muse whose name it bears. The ground is very tender, but the interests of truth are too sacred and important to be sacrificed to delicacy. The silence of Mr. Sheridan on a subject that so nearly affected his credit, as a dramatist, cannot be justified either on the plea of ignorance or of conscious dignity. He could not be unacquainted with what was very commonly reported soon after the appearance of the play, for he has some broad allusions to the subject in the celebrated farce which he avowedly brought out for the purpose of making his detractors ridiculous. But contempt is no answer, and ridicule is no test of truth. The comedy of the School for Scandal was exhibited as the production of the manager, and it is still considered as exclusively his composition. While time rolls on, the difficulty of settling the question must necessarily be increasing; and this, in all probability, will be one of those critical points about which the spirit of literary research will labour in vain. Like the famous book ascribed to Charles the First, this play may occasion, at a future period, considerable discussion, and contention, unless the friends and

contemporaries of Mr. Sheridan shall put the matter completely at rest by producing the manuscript in his own hand writing, and supporting it by such testimonies of his claim as cannot be controverted. That a manuscript of this play, in the rough and original state in which it came from the author, with interlineations and corrections by another hand, is in existence, can be asserted with confidence: it will remain, therefore, to see whether, after a lapse of near forty years, one of the best effusions of the comic muse shall still continue locked up from the public as unworthy of a name, and properly consigned to the foundling hospital of wit.

Traditional stories are always to be received with great caution; and had the right of Sheridan to the sole merit of having written this play been questioned upon no other grounds, his vindication would have been totally unnecessary. But the accusation wore a grave aspect many years ago, and when he must have been sensibly alive to every thing that affected his literary fame. Some of his enemies taxed him with a breach of confidence, but others only asserted that he had assumed the character of a sponsor and foster-parent to a piece which the author relinquished from motives of friendship, and which he was afterwards too generous to claim.

When such stories were afloat, the obvious course pointed out by prudence and justice was that of publishing the play at least, even though it

might not have been deemed necessary to descend into an explicit refutation of the calumnies that were in circulation. This was not done, and the seclusion of the piece within the walls of the theatre, together with a total forbearance of all explanation on the part of the manager, served to strengthen the suspicion, that, however embellished the tale might be, it was not altogether fiction.

No man likes to be deceived in what has excited his admiration, and for the reputed author of which he has long entertained the high respect that is due to pre-eminent genius. That the doubt raised so long since, in regard to the author of the *School for Scandal*, has never yet been satisfactorily cleared up, either by investigation or explanation, by him who was most interested in the matter, is to be lamented, because an unfavourable impression has been made, which will become deeper and more extensive in proportion to the lapse of years, and the efforts that may be made for its removal. As this comedy is the corner stone of Sheridan's literary fame, the question of his entire claim to the composition is of material importance, and therefore no blame can be incurred for having stated the charge of deception in the strongest light, and the circumstantial evidence by which it is supported; that, if possible, the truth may be plainly developed before the opportunity shall pass away never to return. The accusation is not now, for the first

time, brought before the public ; and as it once obtained so much credit as to be admitted into a work of established authority, on the subject of dramatic history, to have suppressed all notice of it in this place would have argued either a pitiful timidity or a culpable partiality. The standard character of the play itself requires that this question of its origin should be fairly stated, that they who are competent to decide it effectually may be stimulated to the undertaking, while the information of living witnesses can be procured, and while written evidences, to support the entire right of Mr. Sheridan to the composition, can be produced. This is rendered more indispensable by the pertinacious silence which has hitherto been observed in regard to a direct allegation, very explicitly, though not perhaps altogether accurately, stated, upon the supposed parentage of this comedy. Whether that account be correct or not, in the whole, the implication which it conveyed was so very serious as to deserve consideration, especially when it was connected with other relations to the same purport.

The play is still exhibited on the stage as the most luminous production of the muse of Sheridan ; and it has been consecrated as such in honour of his memory ; but, invidious as it may appear to throw a doubt over his claim, literary justice demands an explanation of the reasons why it has never been printed from the original manuscript,

and why not the smallest notice has ever been publicly taken of the ascription of this celebrated piece to other hands. Indifference to censure may be laudable under a consciousness of rectitude; and silence amidst unmerited reproach is the triumph of dignity over malice: but the case is of another nature, in a charge of deception which affects the interests of literature no less than the reputation of an individual. Here is a debt due to the public for the confidence that has been placed in private integrity; and whatever carelessness a man may feel about the credit of writing a play, yet he is surely under an obligation of honour to defend the laurel which has been set upon his head by the best judges of dramatic excellence, and which is confirmed by universal suffrage.

CHAPTER IV.

Farther Purchase of Drury Lane Theatre.—Change in the Management.—Other Theatrical Speculations.—Entertainment of the Camp.—Death of Mr. Garrick.—Monody delivered on that Occasion.—Farce of the Critic.—Epilogue to the Tragedy of Fatal Falsehood.

IN the year 1778, Mr. Willoughby Lacy disposed of his moiety of Drury Lane theatre to Mr. Sheridan, at the price of thirty-one thousand five hundred pounds (for which sum, however, it appears to have been previously mortgaged), with the addition of two annuities of five hundred a-year each: the one for the life of Mr. Lacy, since deceased, and the other for the life of Robert Langford, Esq. Mr. Lacy reserved also the privilege of nominating twenty persons to the free list of the theatre; and it was farther stipulated, that if within the space of three years from that sale, Mr. Lacy should wish to sell either of these annuities wholly, or in shares, he might be at liberty to do so, upon giving notice to Mr. Sheridan; provided only, that no part of what was so disposed of should be for a less sum than fifty pounds a-year.

On the completion of this agreement, the management of the theatre was consigned to old

Mr. Sheridan, for the purpose, as it was said at the time, that his son might be at more liberty to pursue his extensive plans of speculation, one of which was the conducting of the Opera House, then purchased by him and Mr. Harris. But though this might have been one reason for the change, it was not the principal inducement to the resignation of the direction. From the time of the abdication of Garrick, great dissention prevailed in the house, and much dissatisfaction was expressed on the part of the public. Little or no attention was paid to the choice of dramatic pieces, and the leading performers complained heavily of the indifference with which they were treated. Irregularities multiplied in the business of the theatre, and no exertion was made to gratify the taste of the town by the exhibition of new plays, and a proper variety of entertainment. The run of the *School for Scandal* was indeed abundantly lucrative on the nights of its performance; but one play, however excellent, could not satisfy the craving appetite of the public; and its continued repetition, without some additional novelty, was calculated to give offence on all sides. Such was the state of things when the father of Mr. Sheridan succeeded to the administration of Drury Lane: but though his qualifications for the office could not be called in question, neither his temper nor the regulations which he adopted, were of a cast to correct abuses and to restore order. He was opposed

with vehemence in many of the measures which he proposed for the general good; and the difficulty which he felt in controuling a pertinacious spirit that had taken possession of some of the actors, was increased by the want of confidence and support on the part of the proprietors. In this stormy season, which was rendered more gloomy by the aspect of public affairs, and the threat of an invasion, an entertainment was brought out at Drury Lane, called "The Camp," in which the military character of the nation was depicted in a very ludicrous and unbecoming manner. This attempt to burlesque the British soldiery, at a time when they were called upon to defend the land of their fathers, was extremely imprudent to say the least of it, and the piece was accordingly censured severely, but justly, in the public prints. The farce was generally ascribed to the pen of Sheridan, but he has since been vindicated from that disgrace by Tate Wilkinson, in the supplement to his memoirs.

It is not a little extraordinary, however, that no public disavowal of this contemptible production was ever made on the part of the person most affected by the imputation, and to whom this forcible remonstrance was addressed when the entertainment came out at Drury Lane. "At this impending moment," says an anonymous writer, "is it wise, is it honourable, in a poet of such talents as Mr. Sheridan, to vilify and throw dis-

grace on the national character; to sink the virtue of courage in its own esteem, and hold it forth in colours that tend to make us shun and despise instead of admiring it? *Bombast* is much more pardonable than *burlesque*. The first may exalt a weak mind, but the second must depress a strong one: and as courage, if it is not to be acquired, is at least to be improved, I would rather see another Lee write one Alexander, than a thousand Sheridans write a thousand *Camps*."

Next to the folly of writing such a piece was the indiscretion of suffering it to disgrace the stage at a period when the country was distracted by party, and menaced by a combination of foreign foes, who were bent upon its destruction, or at least upon the annihilation of its naval power and commercial interests. It is hard to account for the apathy of Mr. Sheridan, and the little concern which he had for his reputation, when he could permit a farce of this description to pass current in the world as the effusion of his genius. If the piece was really his composition, prudence would have hinted the propriety of concealing its origin; and if it was not his performance, he acted very unjustly to himself, as well as disrespectfully to the public, in omitting to disavow what was universally ascribed to his pen by the daily papers, by the frequenters of the theatre, and even by his most intimate friends. Yet Wilkinson, on what authority does not appear, has gratuitously attri-

buted this piece of buffoonery to another hand, and in doing this he has rendered that service to the literary character of Sheridan which the latter ought to have executed for himself.

The death of Mr. Garrick, on the twentieth of January, 1779, was very sensibly felt by Mr. Sheridan, who had experienced the most substantial proofs of his kindness, and was uniformly in the possession of his confidence and esteem to the last. Garrick, indeed, may be said to have acted a paternal part towards his young friend, who, it must be acknowledged, was not deficient in his attentions; and at the funeral he officiated as chief mourner; but though, on that occasion, the first literary characters of the age, and particularly those who had lived on terms of intimacy with the deceased, were anxious to shew their respect for his talents and his worth by joining in the procession, old Mr. Sheridan was not of the number.

Soon after the funeral, public expectation was raised by the announcement of a poetical tribute to the memory of the departed Roscius, which was to be delivered, with an accompaniment of music, at Drury Lane. The delay which took place between the promise and the performance, only served to increase desire, and to create, in the lovers of the drama and the admirers of Garrick, the anticipation of an exquisite treat. At length, on the eleventh of March, this boasted "Monody

to the memory of Mr. Garrick" was pronounced by Mrs. Yates, with sufficient elegance and pathos; but the house, though crowded in all parts, evinced more respect for the subject than delight with the entertainment.

The monody and the music failed alike in the power of giving satisfaction to the friends of Garrick and to the lovers of harmony. Veneration for departed merit indeed kept down the expression of disapprobation, but the sullen silence observed on the occasion plainly manifested the feeling of disappointment. As the poem was soon afterwards printed, the world had an opportunity of ascertaining its merits and defects more accurately than could have been the case when judging by the ear alone, in a large assembly, and amidst a variety of objects to confound the attention. The monody opens with a call upon the audience to lament the death of Garrick in a very formal description of his pompous funeral, which manifested

"The grac'd respect that claim'd him to the last."

The spot where he lies interred is then alluded to as having been indicated by the image of Shakspeare, which,

"From its hallow'd base,

Seem'd to prescribe the grave, and point the place."

Having thus animated, as it were, the marble statue with Promethean fire, the elegiast very

unaccountably enters into a disquisition upon the fame arising from the profession of painting, sculpture, and poetry, with a comparison between the productions of genius in those arts and the excellence of an actor. How such an analogy could have entered into the imagination of any man whose province should have been confined to the exclusive object of Garrick's extraordinary merits as a man and a performer, it would be needless to examine. What is said of painting cannot be very easily understood, because nothing definite is stated, unless the conjunction of Reynolds and Raphael be admitted as original and illustrative. Here, however, the poet was most unfortunate, for his obvious intention being to pay a fine compliment to his friend Sir Joshua, he has in the attempt, through want of judgment and the knowledge of the subject, passed an indirect censure. The evanescent character of that great artist's colouring is matter of deep regret in the present age, and will be more so a century hence. Yet, in this forced comparison of the modern painter with Raphael, the one is described as being only the wonder of his own time, while the works of the other have descended through many successive generations "with undiminished awe,"

"Even beauty's portrait wears a softer prime,
Touch'd by the tender hand of mellowing time."

What is said of sculpture the professors and

admirers of that art will not be very willing to admit; and others will not easily comprehend. To reduce Phidias and Praxiteles into the vulgar class of mere workers in stone, and to represent them as labouring copyists, after the designs of original genius, is an act of such injustice that nothing can excuse but the want of taste or of science. But though the most exquisite remains of the Grecian sculptors still command reverence, and are studied with diligence, as being the perfect models of grace, form, and expression, while none of the pictures of the ancients have been preserved from the ravages of time to stand the test of criticism, we are imperiously told in the monody to place the productions of the one at an infinite distance from those of the other, for

“ The patient sculptor owns a humbler part,
A ruder toil, and more mechanic art;
Content with slow and tim'rous stroke to trace
The lingering line, and mould the tardy grace.”

It is true that the contemplation of a figure in marble will more readily impress the mind with the sober idea of patient industry and laborious application, than a painting of the same object upon canvas, because the material of the sculptor is palpable to the senses; and what we see and feel, we at the same moment know has been once a shapeless mass of stone. But the man of science and genius looks at the statue with other feelings, and never once

thinks of the days and nights that have been devoted to the work, any more than of the toilsome exercise which was necessary to convert a rude block of marble into the form of an Apollo or a Venus. Both the painter and the statuary must labour with care and by rule to attain eminence, though this difference marks their performances, that skill and diligence are more obvious in the work of the one than of the other, by being exercised upon a solid and undisguised substance. Yet, after all, it may be very properly said, what have such nice distinctions and observations upon the comparative merits of the fine arts, or even upon the more enduring and universal beauties of poetry, to do with the excellence of an actor? The only feasible account that can be alleged for the introduction of these remarks upon the degrees of celebrity arising from these sources, was the difficulty which the author of the monody felt himself under in raising Garrick to a station of equality with those who have attained immortality by their pre-eminence in the several pursuits of painting, sculpture, and poetry. But he would have done better in following a more even and direct course, one more suitable to the real character of the man, more descriptive of his professional merits, and more forcibly adapted to waken the recollections of the hearers to those scenes which had so often excited their admiration and their mirth. Instead of this, their patience was exhausted by subjects

in which they could feel at the moment not the smallest interest, and of which, from what they heard, no clear ideas could be formed of what was meant. The exordium is longer than the panegyric, and the audience, after being told that painting leaves memorials by which the powers of the artist may be estimated,—that the sculptured fragments of the ancients mark their industry and taste,—and that

“Superior hopes the poet’s bosom fire,”

proceeds very gravely to lament the hard fate of the actor, whose fame “rests solely upon feeble tradition.”

More moralizing and discussion then follow upon the peculiar province and effects of the histrionic art, correct, indeed, in the principles, and mellifluous in the versification; but neither new, striking, nor pathetic. This part of the poem might, like the generality of funeral sermons, have been delivered in an eulogium upon any other performer as well as Garrick, for it is the praise of the art, and not a characteristic sketch of the man.

In an appeal to the feelings, judgment, and remembrance of the house, upon the claims of Garrick to their fond regard, not a line is to be found descriptive of his varied powers as a tragic and comic actor. The few couplets devoted to the direct subject of the monody contain nothing

more than generalizing declamation upon his excellence, without marking in what particulars he excelled. Neither his astonishing talent in expressing the passion of jealousy in Othello, or that of ambition in Richard, his representation of the aged Lear, or of the youthful Hamlet, is at all touched upon throughout the piece; where Shakspeare, with whose name that of Garrick will always to an English ear be identified, is not once named, except at the commencement, in giving animation to his statue for the purpose of pointing out the grave of the performer. It is surprising that Mr. Sheridan, when he knew how circumscribed his limits were with regard to the space of time for the delivery of his monody, should have wasted so much of that time in a tedious and inaccurate discourse upon matters totally unconnected with that subject, which ought to have absorbed all his thoughts, and to have been managed in such a manner as to have excited the same varied emotions in the audience as the lamented Roscius had often done on the same boards.

It was natural for the public to expect that a monody or eulogy, pronounced in a theatre upon the highest ornament of the stage, would have been exclusively occupied in a glowing delineation of those characters which Garrick had been accustomed to perform with an electrifying effect upon the spectators of his commanding influence over the passions. But so far from descending to minute

particulars, and recalling the memory of the hearers to the most solemn and affecting scenes in the historic dramas of Shakspeare, or to the lively and laughable ones of the comic walk in which Garrick moved unrivalled, the poet passed the whole over in silence, and contented himself with descanting in general terms upon the beauty of the art, and invoking the muse to guard the "laurell'd shrine" of her favourite, "with patient woe that loves the lingering tear."

The poem is harmonious throughout, and has some very happy thoughts well expressed, but it never rises above mediocrity. It is bare of imagery, even where the subject most strongly calls for the aid of that illustration, but its radical defect is a phlegmatic coldness. The author does not seem to feel any sense of that loss which he describes, and what is equally strange, he has preserved a total silence upon the private virtues of Garrick: though here he had an ample field for praise, without being liable to the charge of flattery. That great actor did more to elevate the character of his profession, than ever had been done in this or any other country, before his time. He was correct in his own conduct, and by his example he contributed much to reform the manners of his brethren, not only in their professional character, but in their general deportment. His great ambition, observed Dr. Johnson, was to make truth diffuse her radiance from the stage,

and he succeeded beyond what might have been expected in expelling the buffoonery, rant, and immorality, which had long prevailed, to the injury alike of the drama and the public. Nowwithstanding the publicity of this fact, and upon which the poet ought to have dilated with energy, the brightest part of Garrick's character is wholly omitted in the monody, where nothing is said of his qualifications that would lead to any idea of his combining a zeal for the cause of virtue with the laudable ambition of fame. Where so much intrinsic excellence prevailed to render the actor still more estimable, the eulogist ought to have availed himself of the advantages afforded by his subject in expatiating feelingly upon the union of private worth with splendid talents, in a vocation exposed beyond all others to the allurements of vice and dissipation. Here was substantial matter for eulogium, infinitely exceeding the comparatively empty credit of having stood at the head of a calling in which, as we have seen, it does not always require virtue to obtain celebrity. When, therefore, Garrick added to the unparalleled lustre of his reputation as a performer, the more shining ornaments which made him useful in society; it became the duty, as it should have been the pleasure, of the poet, to have displayed this part of his character in glowing colours. But here a dead silence was maintained, as if the deceased Roscius had left no remembrance of his virtues behind; or

that it was deemed most prudent to rest his pretensions to fame upon the fleeting memorial of his eminence as a public performer.

This indifference to a moral end is the prevailing defect of all Mr. Sheridan's productions; and the ensuing season he gave a remarkable instance of it in his farce of the "Critic, or a Tragedy rehearsed," which appeared, for the first time, at Drury Lane, on Saturday, October the 30th, 1779.

The only part that can lay any claim to originality in this entertainment, which is wholly destitute of a plot, is the first act, in which the character of Sir Fretful Plagiary must be admitted to have exhibited a striking sketch, in many respects, of a dramatic writer, whose nervous sensibility often made him ridiculous. The late Mr. Cumberland was so tenderly alive to every thing that affected his literary reputation, as to court the opinions and praises of those who he knew had little regard for him or his works. He stooped sometimes to paltry artifices for the sake of eliciting a compliment; and when any of his pieces failed to give public satisfaction, he was querulous as a child at the loss of a plaything, and vented his lamentations in bitter complaints of the malignity and envy of his rivals. This weakness, however, while it afforded matter for pity among his best friends, and amusement to others, had no effect upon his compositions, the sterling value

of which ought to have protected the author from the lash of satire. But the moral excellence of the dramas of Cumberland seems to have given the same offence, to certain persons of fashion, in his day, as the tragedies of Dryden did to the licentious wits in the court of Charles the Second. This is freely confessed in the prologue to the "Critic," written by the late General Fitzpatrick, who speaks first of the Duke of Buckingham's attack upon Dryden, and then offers this singular apology for the liberty here taken with the writers of modern comedy :

Thalia, once so ill behav'd and rude,
Reform'd, is now become an arrant prude,
Retailing nightly to the yawning pit
The purest morals, undefil'd by wit."

That Cumberland was the principal object at whom the shaft of ridicule was directed, could not be doubted by any who were acquainted with that gentleman and his writings; and Mr. Sheridan, so far from disguising his intention in the application, took every opportunity, in public and private, of expressing his satisfaction at the mortification which it produced. One night of the performance of the Critic, Cumberland was observed to be present; and when the circumstance was mentioned to Sheridan, he asked his friend whether he had seen him laugh, to which the other replied in the negative. "Why, then," re-

plied he, "that was cursedly ungrateful in him, for during the representation of his last tragedy I laughed confoundedly at every scene."

What was the cause of the quarrel between Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Cumberland has never been clearly stated ; but the generally accredited story at the time was, that the former, in his capacity of manager, rejected every piece that Cumberland offered at Drury Lane, which occasioned some sharp language on both sides ; and as other literary persons had similar complaints against the conduct of the manager, a common concern was made of the injury, and the newspapers daily exhibited some severe criticisms upon theatrical subjects and the direction of Drury Lane. To counteract these attempts upon his official character, Sheridan took "The Rehearsal," as a model for an attack upon his adversaries ; but in this he was assisted by his brother-in-law, Tickell, who had a caustic severity of style in composition, and whose share in this piece may be very easily traced by any one that will take the trouble to compare "The Critic" with that gentleman's celebrated pamphlet entitled "Anticipation." The characters of Dangle and Sneer are admirably drawn, and forcibly contrasted ; but that of Puff is out of the bounds of all probability, and in the leading feature is a palpable imitation, rendered worse, however, by copying, of Shift in Foote's comedy of "The Minor." Both of these dramatic personages are equally vain

of their versatile talents, and eager to gain credit for their ingenuity in deceiving mankind. But Puff, in the farce, is altogether a being that never could have existed ; for he is drawn as a fellow who lives by planning tricks to impose upon the public, and yet making no secret of his trade. He gives a most minute confession of all his rogueries, with the entire art and mystery of his craft, to the very persons whose disposition and interest it is to expose his villainy.

There is, no doubt, much to excite risibility in this entertainment ; and on that account it holds its ground among the stock pieces of the theatre : but though the audience may now laugh, without assisting in wounding the feelings of a worthy character, that was far from being the case at the period when “ The Critic ” was in the zenith of its popularity. Merriment is wretchedly procured at the expense of humanity : and when the foibles of an ingenious and good man are exposed to public ridicule, though the observer may enjoy the joke without thinking of the sufferings of an individual, no excuse can be offered for the writer who wantonly perverts his wit in order to render a fellow-creature miserable. Ridicule is a very powerful engine, particularly upon the stage, where it may be successfully employed in laying open to general contempt those vicious deformities which the law cannot punish : but it is also an instrument capable of doing incalculable mischief, by becoming

the vehicle of malignity. The Athenians, it is true, allowed the practice of representing real characters in the theatre; but it was required that the names should be publicly announced; by which means the parties, if unjustly treated, might obtain redress. Even Socrates defended this usage upon the plea of utility, and that it tended to correct the manners of the people by the admonition of the stage, in which case only, he observed, comedy might be a public benefit. Yet the philosopher himself was an instance of the danger of granting this indulgence to the sport of ingenuity and the caprice of the populace. Aristophanes took advantage of the license to exhibit that great moralist ludicrously in his comedy of the Clouds; but the success of that piece was more disgraceful to the author and the degenerate citizens of Athens than to the philosopher. Without making any comparison between the ancients and the moderns, thus much at least may be maintained in strict justice, that the works of Cumberland will delight and edify remote generations, when the attempt to render him contemptible, on account of some little infirmity in his temper, shall have lost its point, and be forgotten.

In this year Mr. Sheridan's muse was much better employed upon a very lively and characteristic epilogue to the tragedy of Fatal Falsehood, written by Miss Hannah Moore.

The following lines, descriptive of a learned

lady's toilet, would have done credit to the pen of Swift.

“ What motley cares Corilla's mind perplex,
While maids and metaphors conspire to vex!
In studious deshabillé behold her sit,
A letter'd gossip, and a housewife wit :
At once invoking, though for diff'rent views,
Her gods, her cook, her milliner, and muse:
Round her strew'd room, a frippery chaos lies,
A chequer'd wreck of notable and wise.
Bills, books, caps, couplets, combs, a vary'd mass,
Oppress the toilet and obscure the glass;
Unfinish'd here an epigram is laid,
And there a mantua-maker's bill unpaid.
Three newborn plays, foretaste the town's applause,
There dormant patterns pine for future gauze.
A moral essay now is all her care,
A satire next, and then a bill of fare.
A scene she now projects, and now a dish,
Here's act the first, and here—“ remove with fish.”
Now, while this eye in a fine frenzy rolls,
That soberly casts up a bill for coals,
Black pins and daggers in one leaf she sticks,
And tears and thread, and bowls and thimbles mix.”

At this time the dramatic concerns of Mr. Sheridan were very much embroiled by his own carelessness, and loud complaints were made against him both in public and private. His father, after struggling to overcome the difficulties with which the direction of the Drury Lane theatre was involved, relinquished the office which he had undertaken, on account of the obstacles that were continually

thrown in his way, even by those who ought to have supported him for their own interest. The son was totally unqualified for the management; and from the period of his obtaining a principal share in that house, its affairs went rapidly into disorder. Mr. Sheridan was fond of company; and his own pleasant manners, very naturally occasioned a continual increase of acquaintance, among whom he numbered many of the first characters in the kingdom. Thus expenses were incurred which it was not easy to discharge; and hence much murmuring ensued at the want of regularity and attention to the economy of the theatre. In the time of Mr. Garrick every person was punctually paid, order was strictly observed, and, of course, as far as related to the credit of the house, no complaints were heard. By this means the manager realized a princely fortune in the most honourable manner, and maintained his own reputation unsullied as well as that of the extensive business in which he was concerned. The reverse of all this was experienced under his successor, who neither imitated Garrick in his application to the private circumstances of the theatre, nor felt any desire to follow his example for the purpose of raising himself to a state of independence.

In the spring of 1780, Thomas Davies, the bookseller and actor, published his memoirs of the English Roscius, which he dedicated to Mr.

Sheridan in a very neat inscription, wherein, among other complimentary remarks, he says, "The propriety of addressing these volumes to you, will not, I believe, be contested; but, independent of your being the immediate successor of Mr. Garrick, and a most eminent writer in dramatic poetry, the author of the most pleasing and successful entertainment of the stage, which has ever been presented; besides, too, your being endowed with many shining qualities and amiable virtues, I confess I had another motive for this dedication: gratitude was my strongest incentive to it. Your kindness shewn to me at a time when I most stood in need of your friendship can never be blotted from my remembrance. This is a subject which I could, with delight, enlarge upon; but I am convinced, from the constant pleasure you feel in conferring favours, you would rather do a thousand generous actions than be told of one."

This grateful testimony was equally honourable to both parties; and of the liberality of Mr. Sheridan, notwithstanding the errors which he committed, another instance should be here related. A person who had written a dramatic piece upon some temporary circumstance, put it into the hands of the manager, who, with his wonted carelessness, threw it aside and forgot it, till the season elapsed, after which it could be of no use. When the author applied for his manuscript, and

gently remonstrated on the treatment he had met with, Mr. Sheridan returned him his play, accompanied by a handsome letter of apology, inclosing a bank note of the value of one hundred pounds, as an atonement for his neglect.

Among the dramatic exhibitions which have been attributed to his genius, about this period, one of the lowest description was the pantomime of "Robinson Crusoe, or Harlequin Friday," which was solely indebted for its uncommon success to the popularity of the story, the beauty of Loutherbourog's scenery, and the skill of the performers: but as a composition, it was justly observed at the time to be "a proof that even the greatest genius will sink beneath contempt when he contends with a mechanic in his own profession."

CHAPTER V.

*Early Connexions.—Lord John Townshend.—Mr. Fox.
—Political Associations.—Senatorial Ambition.—Elec-
tioneering Manœuvres.—Attempt upon Honiton.—Suc-
cess at Stafford.*

AN inclination to wander from the beaten course of practical wisdom and utility, where an independence might have been honourably acquired, to indulge in romantic speculations and idle pursuits, seems to have been a common failing in the family of Sheridan. The secession of the British Roscius from the stage, and the liberal disposition of his theatrical property, opened a source of wealth to his successor, which, in a few years, would have placed him in a state of affluence, and established his reputation upon a solid basis. Though Garrick possessed unrivalled merit as a performer, and of course reaped an immense harvest from his professional exertions, Mr. Sheridan was not without some corresponding advantages, for he had already attained high distinction in the department of dramatic composition best adapted to replenish the treasury of his theatre, and to gratify the public taste. It might have been expected, therefore, that with such talents and encouragement, he would have

devoted himself to the cultivation of a field already prepared to his hands, and from which he could not fail, with due exertion, to clear an income adequate to every reasonable wish.

But unfortunately for Mr. Sheridan, and, equally unfortunate for the concern in which he was embarked, his thoughts took a turn to political associations; and he was led to believe that, if he could secure a seat in parliament, he should soon gain an ascendancy there which must eventually raise him to a situation much more dignified and lucrative than that which he held in the direction of a playhouse. The ill success of the contest with America, and the increasing difficulties of Lord North's administration, certainly held out a prospect of establishing themselves in power to the leaders of opposition and their adherents. Mr. Sheridan had long been attached to this party; and his most intimate companions consisted of those who were the assailants of the minister in the senate. His great friend, Mr. Burke, was one of the number; but a congeniality of sentiment, and a similar gaiety of disposition, united him more closely to Mr. Fox, with whom he became acquainted through Lord John Townshend, for which we have his lordship's authority in a letter written to a common friend after the death of Sheridan, and apologizing for his unavoidable absence at the funeral. "I am one," says he, "of

Mr. Sheridan's earliest friends. He, I, and poor Tickell (whose memory, with all his faults, will ever be dear to me), lived together in the closest habits of friendship from earliest life, long before Sheridan's introduction to public life, before the *DUENNA*'s appearance, before he was known to Fox, to whom I had the pleasure of introducing him. I made the first dinner party at which they met, having told Fox that all the notions he might have conceived of Sheridan's talents and genius from the comedy of the *Rivals*, &c. would fall infinitely short of the admiration of his astonishing powers, which I was sure he would entertain at the first interview. This first interview between them (there were very few present, only Tickell and myself, and one or two more) I shall never forget. Fox told me, after our breaking up from dinner, that he had always thought Hare, after my uncle Charles Townshend, the wittiest man he ever met with, but that Sheridan surpassed them both infinitely: and Sheridan the next day told me that he was quite lost in admiration of Fox, and that it was a puzzle to him to say what he admired most, his commanding superiority of talent and universal knowledge, or his playful fancy, artless manners, and benevolence of heart, which shewed itself in every word he uttered. Ever afterwards we continued intimately and closely connected to the hour of his death, and

nothing could give me a severer pang than to have it supposed that I was remiss in my duties upon the last sad occasion."

With such fascinating powers of conversation, it could be no wonder that the circle of Sheridan's acquaintance enlarged when he became known to persons of the first distinction in the world of fashion. But the charm of wit, like every other ephemeral pleasure, is productive of no utility; and when eagerly courted, it becomes dangerous to the possessor, by fostering vanity and encouraging indolence. The liveliness of Mr. Sheridan, his readiness at repartee, and his unrestrained flow of words, on any subject, without the smallest appearance of premeditated thought or affectation of manner, naturally made him the delight of every convivial party into which he entered. They who once witnessed the brilliancy of his discourse, were anxious for a repetition of the pleasure which they had experienced; and others, upon their report, felt as ardent a desire to enjoy the same gratification. It would perhaps be too severe to call this a factious reputation, but certainly it was one that had no solid basis; and consequently it neither tended to increase the knowledge nor to improve the circumstances of him, who merely, on account of the elegance of his language, and the pleasantry of his wit, was a general object of admiration. The principal of Mr. Sheridan's political friends entertained a strong opinion that the eloquence which

was at all times at his command would render him a very valuable acquisition to their ranks in the House of Commons. Consultations were held upon the subject : and as the time for the natural dissolution of parliament was drawing very near, an overture was made to the late Duke of Portland for one of his boroughs. His grace, however, being either already engaged to other persons, or affecting to be so, by way of excuse, this application failed ; on which it was found necessary to seek for success in different directions.

It seems not a little extraordinary, that among the various acquaintance of Mr. Sheridan none of them had weight enough to secure a borough for him, by their interest with the various great families to whom they were allied, and who were as zealous on the side of opposition as any of the party. Through the influence of Mr. Fox, it might have been expected that an admission into the House of Commons would have been attended with no difficulty, and at little expense. But the case was otherwise : and though it is probable that every trial was made to obtain a seat in the easiest and most accommodating way, by recommendation and patronage, Mr. Sheridan was left to try the customary expedients in those places where the electors enjoy their own privilege of volition in the choice of proper persons to represent them in parliament. At the time when the dissolution took place an opening offered at Stafford, where Mr. Monkton

was also a candidate, with a tolerable prospect of success, and who, very generously, promised to use his exertions on the behalf of his friend Sheridan. But being aware of the uncertainty attending all determinations that are to be decided by the caprice of a multitude, Mr. Sheridan made a tour into the west, to examine personally the condition and temper of those boroughs which were free from any controuling power to direct their election. While he was upon this circuit, some of his friends were equally diligent in their inquiries, and among the rest an eminent artist, who had no slight influence with his relatives and acquaintance in his native town of Honiton. That influence he spontaneously employed in promoting the views of Sheridan; and when he found that there was some probability of success, he wrote to his friend, from whom he received this curious letter.

“My dear Sir,
 “Upon my soul, I believe you were wrong about Honiton, as I have been close to it; but though courted, was obliged to go to another place. Therefore, now do two things; first, write a letter to Honiton (by express better), and tell them that before the election, yet a good man and true may offer, and pay them too, and that they should act accordingly.—Secondly, send me a letter to the post-office, Bridgewater, which will

notify that I am the person, and puff me too. All this is in case on my return from where I am going, if unsuccessful, I should want to try Honiton, having an offer of a very strong support. Do these two things.

“Your’s, in real haste,

“R. B. SHERIDAN.”

In compliance with the first request, his friend accordingly wrote the following letter to a leading person in the borough:—

“Dear Sir,

“I know not how to apologize for presuming to address you on the subject of an election, whose natural disposition is probably averse to such concerns; but a gentleman, a very particular friend of mine, has signified a wish to become a candidate, if there is any probability of his succeeding. I think it would be prudent, if there are any votes unengaged, to keep themselves so till I can send them something more satisfactory. This gentleman is Mr. Sheridan, a particular friend of Mr. Charles Fox, Mr. Fitzpatrick, and all the first and most considerable characters in this kingdom; himself of the most shining talents and independent principles.

“Either ministry or opposition would be happy to engage him; but he will be independent.

“If you should chuse to interest yourself, and

should have any of your voters unengaged, you could never bestow them on one who has more ability to be generally useful, or who can be more particularly serviceable to the inhabitants of Honiton, as he is beloved and almost adored by all parties."

September 3rd, 1780.

What progress was made in this negotiation, or how far the electors of Honiton, who consist of all payers of scot and lot, were made acquainted with the qualifications of Mr. Sheridan, does not appear; but from a letter which he subsequently wrote to his friend upon this occasion, it seems that he was anticipated by a more wealthy candidate, in conjunction with the late Sir George Yonge. The letter, which is without a date, is as follows:—

"My dear Sir,

"I am very much obliged to you for the trouble you have taken, and for your letter. I assure you I am the farthest in the world from being indifferent in this matter, for something has happened since I saw you, to make me think still more of it. Do you think it would be impolitic if I were to talk a little with our friend Crispin? If you were to send him to me, I could do it without letting him conceive that I was the person in question. They are damned fellows, if they think to mend themselves by chusing a Scotchman, and

a Mac too! But let me see; you will be at Honiton on Wednesday, and I may have a letter from you on Friday: and I assure you I shall be most seriously obliged to you if you will get the best intelligence you can immediately. My reason for wishing to be so quick in it is, that if there appears a tolerable probability, I would get Sir George Yonge applied to immediately not to engage his interest, if he has not done it.

“I have been looking at the account of the voters of Honiton, and I find that Sir George Yonge had them almost all for him; and it must be bad if he supports this Scot.

“Your’s faithfully,

“R. B. SHERIDAN.”

At this time the borough of Stafford was in contemplation, where, however, a struggle was expected, attended as usual with no trifling expense. Mr. Sheridan was willing to secure what interest he could at Honiton without committing himself; and there is reason to believe that the excellent and accomplished person who took so much pains on his behalf in Devonshire was ignorant of what was going on at Stafford, till the election, which was a pretty sharp one for the time, had terminated in Mr. Sheridan’s favour. One of his panegyrists asserted, several years ago, in an inaccurate memoir of him, that he resolved to canvas Stafford for himself, because it was a

place free from all suspicion of ministerial influence; and the arts of corruption had ever tried, without effect, to undermine the independence of the electors. After this bold assumption, the anonymous writer, with the accustomed good fortune of those who speak at random, subjoins a complete contradiction of all that he had stated concerning the virtue of Stafford, and the motives of its new member, in these words.—“But although Mr. Sheridan experienced uncommon disinterestedness and great liberality of conduct in the people of Stafford, a certain degree of expense, which has, for a long time, blended itself with the purest proceedings of the elective system in this country, was found unavoidable, and our young politician’s resources were not in the most flourishing state. He was soon convinced, that the moderate sum of one thousand pounds was a *sine qua non*, which alone could bring the negotiation between the new champion of liberty and the independent electors to a successful conclusion. The money was at length raised, and one of the gentlemen, who contributed to the supply, has been since liberally rewarded with an opera share.”*

This, it must be confessed, is a very awkward apology for bribery and corruption, as practised by a man of patriotic principles in an independent

* Public Characters of 1799. 8vo. p. 44.

borough, where it is said that such arts to undermine the virtue of the worthy electors had hitherto been tried in vain. But according to this account, which was avowedly written by a friend to Mr. Sheridan and his party, Stafford was not more incorrupt than other places; and as to the champion of liberty, he was under the necessity of borrowing a sum of money to secure his election. Virtuous as that borough was, it seems that the candidate for her favour was required to get possession of the golden bough before he could be admitted to the privileges which the ancient matron had to impart. Thus patriots must submit to the observance of the same rites in their passage to the awful seat of political mysteries, as other men of less scrupulous integrity and delicacy of feeling:

Sed non ante datur telluris operta subire,

Auricomos quam quis decerpserit arbore foetus.

When Mr. Sheridan was induced to enter upon his electioneering career, he formed no such romantic expectation as that of being chosen upon independent principles; for on application to the good men of Honiton, a direct assurance was given that, when the candidate appeared, he should be recognised by the attractive sign, well known to the initiated “attollens Palmam auro subtiliter foliatum, nec non Mercurialem etiam Caduceum.”

We have evidence that Stafford exacted no other qualifications of candidates for parliamentary

honours than Honiton; and Sheridan was too conversant with established usages in such cases to rely solely upon the profession of his love of liberty, or his persuasive powers of speech, without presenting to the electors the charm to which they had been so long habituated. Hardly any subject has been more agitated in this free country than the abuse of the elective franchise, and the evil arising from what are called rotten boroughs. Yet these two instances prove, and many more might be added to the number, that in those places which are least under private influence, corruption prevails to as great an extent as in close boroughs, where that influence is paramount. The election at Stafford was conducted in a way which manifested no other discrimination on the part of the voters than what arose from the immediate gratification of their passions. The favourite candidate was wholly unknown to them, and, therefore, they could not have the merit of selecting a man of extraordinary talent and virtue, because they were as entirely ignorant of his political wisdom as they were of his private character. Mr. Sheridan succeeded, as most men do on these occasions, by the pleasantries of his manners, the freedom with which he could enter into the humours of the lowest part of the community, and, more than all, by enabling them to indulge their sensual inclinations for the moment, and by treating them with ample promises of future benefits.

They who cared little for any thing beyond present enjoyment had their wishes gratified without any restriction ; and others, who were mindful of remote advantages, were promised places in the event of success; which condition was fulfilled whenever any of them came to London, by orders for admission at Drury Lane and the Opera House.

But though a petition was presented against the return, on the charges of bribery and corruption, it failed for want of positive proof, and the sitting members for the borough of Stafford were declared to be duly elected. When the petition was brought into the house, Mr. Sheridan treated it as frivolous and malicious, in a speech which drew some droll remarks from Mr. Rigby, who was sarcastically severe upon that part which manifested in the speaker a tender regard for the moral character of his constituents. Mr. Sheridan was relieved by the address of his friend Mr. Fox from the embarrassment into which he had been thrown by his own precipitancy, and the arch insinuations of an experienced veteran in electioneering matters; but the conversation was closed by the authority of the chair, on the ground that there was no question before the house.

This was the first essay of Mr. Sheridan as a parliamentary orator; and though the subject was comparatively one of little interest, he was heard with marked attention, the members being uncommonly still all the time he was speaking. A

few days afterwards he had occasion to deliver his sentiments upon public affairs, when a motion for a vote of thanks to Earl Cornwallis and Sir Henry Clinton was made by Mr. Coke. Though Mr. Sheridan did not oppose the motion, he seized this opportunity of expressing his entire disapprobation of the American war; but he seems to have been principally induced to rise in the course of the debate out of pique at what had shortly before fallen from Mr. Rigby, who, having again exercised his wit at the expense of some of the gentlemen in opposition, laid himself fairly open to an attack in return.

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Sheridan's Motion on the Police of Westminster.—

His Observations on Lotteries.—His spirited opposition to Mr. Fox on the Marriage Act.

THE scandalous riots which had disgraced the metropolis, and astonished the kingdom, in the preceding summer, afforded Mr. Sheridan an opportunity of displaying his powers to great advantage on the meeting of parliament. It was a fact well known, that the inactivity of the magistrates during those outrages, and especially at the commencement, had rendered the interference of the military indispensable. Upon this occasion Mr. Sheridan brought forward, on the fifth of March, a motion for an inquiry into the subject. In this speech he apologized for having undertaken to bring so important a question before parliament, and which he was but ill qualified to discuss. He then proceeded in a strain of declamation to inveigh bitterly against the employment of the military in civil disturbances; and having quoted that part of His Majesty's speech in which the necessity of the case was alleged as a justification of the measure, he called upon ministers to

apply for a bill of indemnity, that they might stand excused for having adopted an unconstitutional measure in desperate circumstances. Having descanted largely upon the danger of trusting to the interposition of soldiers for the suppression of outrages and riots, Mr. Sheridan lamented, justly enough, the defective state of the metropolis as the main cause of the mischief, and concluded a desultory speech, with moving the following resolutions:—1st, “That it is illegal and unjustifiable to order the military to act without the intervention of the civil magistrates, except in cases of the most extreme necessity, when the civil power is absolutely borne down. 2ndly, That it appears from the necessity of employing the military to quell the riots in June last, that there is some great defect in the civil constitution, or police of the City of Westminster. 3rdly, That a committee be appointed to inquire into the state of the police of the said city, and report to the House such improvements as shall appear to them necessary for constituting a police that might prove equal to the preservation of the peace and tranquillity thereof.”

This motion was seconded by the Honourable Richard Fitzpatrick, who, in allusion to his own military rank, declared that he was, in common with his fellow soldiers, extremely anxious to have the question brought to a final issue, so that it might no longer remain in doubt and perplexity.

The late Duke of Norfolk, then Earl of Surrey, took a technical objection to the first resolution, on the ground that it was vague and indeterminate; remarking, that "overthrowing the civil power" was an expression that would admit of various acceptations; and if a discretion should be thus apparently given to government to interpret that charge agreeable to their own will and ideas, it might be applied improperly and unconstitutionally to every riotous proceeding whatever.

Mr. Sheridan, in explanation, defended his resolution upon the plea that Lord Surrey had not accurately attended to the words of his proposition. He asserted that he had himself adverted to the latitude which might be taken in interpreting the exception, and therefore, instead of stating the order for the employment of the military, even in such cases, to be legal, he had only called it justifiable, leaving the specific justification open to the review and determination of parliament in any particular emergency. He declared, however, at the same time, his willingness to leave out that clause, and was anxious that it should be immediately expunged. But the Speaker informed him that the motion having been made and seconded, the course of parliament could only permit it to be altered by another motion for an amendment; on which Mr. Sheridan replied, that he had no objection to withdraw the first part of his motion entirely, since it was merely

declaratory ; but this was checked by the interposition of the Solicitor-General, the present Sir James Mansfield, who rose to oppose the whole proposition. He conceived that the questions brought forward for discussion by the first part of the resolutions had nothing to do with a reform of the police of Westminster, which was the ostensible object of the motion. The learned gentleman contended, that in a constitutional point of view, the power of suppressing commotions was left entirely to the magistracy, without any express provision for military assistance ; and, therefore, he deprecated the formation of abstract opinions into resolutions of the house. The Solicitor-General, in the course of his speech, threw out some sarcastic observations on the universality of knowledge claimed by the members of opposition, who were not only perfectly conversant in naval affairs and military tactics, but were such a congregation of lawyers as could not be paralleled in the world. This piece of irony brought up Mr. Thomas Townshend, who defended his friend Sheridan, by asserting, that in making his motion he had expressed all the diffidence which became him as a young and inexperienced member of that house ; but that his speech proved him equal to any task which he might think proper to undertake. The motion was also supported by Sir George Savile, Mr. Fox, and some other members of the opposition ; but after Mr. Sheridan had withdrawn his

first resolution with the leave of the house, the two last were lost by a considerable majority.

On the second of May the Solicitor-General obtained leave to bring in a bill for the prevention of profanations of the Lord's-day ; and the statement which he gave, as the ground of his application, exhibited a deplorable picture of the public morals at that time. A practice, he said, had of late obtained, of opening places of amusement on Sundays : some were held out avowedly as such ; while others affected to be places of instruction, where religious questions were discussed. Of the former description was Carlisle House, whither, for the seeming purpose of walking, and drinking tea and coffee, persons of the most abandoned cast were wont to resort. Thus virtue was undermined, and religion was sacrificed to vice. In the places set apart for debating theological questions, religion was trampled under foot by the vulgar and ignorant, who wished to acquire a reputation for eloquence in assemblies composed of the young and illiterate. The Solicitor-General brought forward abundant proofs of the truth of what he had stated : and though some opposition was made to his proposition, he obtained leave to bring in his bill, which was carried in a committee on the fifteenth of the same month, when Mr. Sheridan took occasion, from some remarks that were made in the course of the debate about the nuisance of fashionable gaming houses, to deliver his sentiments. He

said that he should not oppose the bill; but he thought that it did not go far enough; nor could he bring himself to believe that any restraint upon gaming could be effectual, so long as gaming was encouraged by government, who entered into partnership with it, and shared the profits, which was done by licensing lottery-offices. He wished, he said, to see that practice abolished; and that as the learned gentleman, the Solicitor-General, had assumed the office of Censor Morum, and Arbiter Elegantiarum, being at once the Cato and Petronius of the age, he would turn his thoughts to the framing of a bill for the purpose of suppressing gaming, and particularly of putting down lottery-offices.

At the close of the same month Lord Beauchamp obtained leave to bring in a bill to remedy certain inconveniences arising from the act to prevent clandestine marriages. It appeared, that by some recent decisions in Westminster Hall, marriages celebrated in consequence of the publication of banns in chapels which were not in being at the time when the marriage act was passed, were declared to be invalid. This doctrine of the Court of King's Bench had the alarming effect of bastardizing thousands, and of bringing ruin upon numerous families of the greatest respectability. The necessity, therefore, of applying a remedy immediately was obvious, and generally admitted, so that his lordship met with no difficulty in pass-

ing his bill for legalizing all marriages that had been celebrated in the manner already mentioned. This question naturally brought the whole marriage act under review; and as the sense of the house appeared to be decidedly in favour of a still further purgation of it, Mr. Fox lost no time in bringing forward a bill for that purpose. On its second reading, he painted the act in the most odious colours; as a direct violation of the laws of God and nature; as an act of despotism, to which the powers of parliament could not constitutionally extend; as a source of depopulation and immorality; inefficacious as to the selfish, contracted benefit meant to be derived from it, but ruinous to the happiness of those who were the strength of every country, and whom every legislature should protect—the lower orders of the community. The act was founded, he said, on the most sordid and narrow principles of a few noble families, who, to gratify their avarice, pride, or ambition, formed restrictions oppressive to the people. But, after all, they had been disappointed; for whoever could pay the expense of a post-chaise to Scotland, laughed at the provisions of the marriage act; while the poor, unable to avail themselves of that evasion, were either rendered miserable by the restraint put upon their inclinations, or plunged into the abyss of vice by the illegal gratification of them. Mr. Fox reprobated the idea of establishing an unnatural authority in the parent, merely because

his reason and experience rendered him superior to those under his government; for this was the universal plea of despotism, public as well as private: thus every system of tyranny was defended, by urging, that it was better for the ignorant to be governed by the wise, than to be allowed the privilege of governing themselves.

In the course of his speech, Mr. Fox quoted a passage from the maxims of Swift, which turned upon this principle,—that there are two passions in the human heart, designed by nature to be stronger than reason:—“the love of life, and the mutual desire subsisting between the sexes.” That these should not be circumscribed by prudence, he contended, was absolutely necessary for the preservation of the species; and consequently, that to restrain them by human laws was counteracting and virtually repealing to the law of Heaven. Population, he observed, never proceeded from reason, but from passion; for, was a computation to be always made by prudence of the profit and loss resulting from marriage, as the rule of our choice, few matches would ever be made; but it was the triumph of passion to subdue every prudential feeling; and in consequence the wisest men are often found, in matrimonial affairs, to set reason out of the question. Mr. Fox then divided his objections against the act into two parts; one relative to the age limited therein as years of discretion, which he thought far too late in life; and the

other respecting the penalty annexed to informal marriages, that of declaring them null; a principle against which he chiefly protested as being one of the most inhuman that ever could have entered into the imagination of any man.

It must be admitted that there was much force in the objections urged against the marriage act on this occasion; but, on the other hand, it is equally certain that the passions of the eloquent mover of the bill carried him too far into the wilds of theory and paradox. He produced some strong facts to shew the oppressive nature of the act; and with these he should have been contented: but when he launched out into a declamation against all legislative restraints in matrimonial engagements, and left nothing to protect parental rights, he gave an encouragement to licentiousness, and opened facilities to greater abuses than those which he wished to correct. It reflects honour upon Mr. Sheridan, that, having discerned the fallacy of what had fallen from his friend in the course of his declamation, he endeavoured to bring him back into a train of serious consideration, by reasoning gravely upon the subject. In his reply, he said, that Mr. Fox appeared not to be aware, that if he carried the clause enabling girls to marry at the age of sixteen, he would do an injury to that liberty of which he had always shewn himself the zealous friend; and would, in effect, promote that domestic tyranny which he

justly reprobated as little less intolerable than public despotism. If girls were allowed to marry at sixteen, they would, he contended, be abridged of that happy freedom of intercourse which modern custom had introduced between the youth of both sexes, and which was, in his opinion, the best nursery of happy marriages. Guardians would, in that case, look on their wards with a suspicious eye, from a fear that footmen, and those about their persons, might take an advantage of their tender years and immature judgment, to persuade them into a marriage as soon as they should attain the age of sixteen. In like manner, observed Mr. Sheridan, young men, when mere boys, in a moment of passion or intoxication, might be prevailed upon to form the most imprudent connexions, by marrying even common prostitutes. He, at the same time, was very ready to admit that the marriage act contained some absurd clauses, which required expurgation; but he could not agree that the whole of the act itself was so impolitic and productive of mischief as to stand in need of a total repeal.

This manly opposition to a favourite measure evidently took Mr. Fox by surprise, and considerably hurt his feelings at the moment; for, in his reply, he let fall some expressions which manifested resentment; but though he affected to treat the observations that had been made by Sheridan with contempt, it was clear enough that

they had involved him in some perplexity. He reprobated the style of reasoning upon which the argument of his honourable friend was built, and said, that he should not have thought it worth his while to say a word in refutation of it, had the objection come from a less respectable quarter. Mr. Fox then attempted to shew that what Mr. Sheridan had advanced was equally favourable to public tyranny and private despotism; insinuating, at the same time, some doubts of his sincerity, by paying this compliment to his ingenuity, "that he could contrive to give an argument what turn he pleased."

It is remarkable that when Mr. Fox moved his clause, that girls should be marriageable, without the consent of parents or guardians, at the age of sixteen, he expressed it as his opinion that the period should be still lower, though for the safety of his bill he had adopted the one which he now proposed. The resistance of Mr. Sheridan to this preposterous and dangerous clause did equal honour to his penetration and independency; and it must be admitted, by every dispassionate reasoner, that his objection was grounded upon the solid basis of political wisdom and experience. But though Fox was obviously piqued at the unexpected opposition which he met with, he entertained no resentment; and his friendship for Sheridan continued unshaken, notwithstanding the little bickering that passed between them on this occasion.

CHAPTER VII.

Decline of Lord North.—Activity of Mr. Sheridan and his Friends in harassing the falling Minister.—Change in Administration.—Mr. Sheridan Under Secretary of State.—His opposition to a Motion respecting Ireland.—Another Change of Ministers.—Mr. Sheridan accused of a Breach of Confidence.—Commencement of Hostilities against Mr. Pitt.—Diamond cut Diamond.

AT the beginning of 1782 the aspect of public affairs gave general discontent; and as it seemed impossible to continue the war much longer, many of those who had supported government with great zeal and firmness began to find excuses for a change of conduct. Thus the ranks of opposition increased daily, and the number of neutrals plainly indicated that the fall of the minister could not be much longer prevented. On the twenty-second of February, General Conway moved an address to His Majesty for a discontinuance of hostilities with America; which motion, after a warm debate, was lost by a single vote. This, however, was justly considered as an effectual triumph; and on the twenty-seventh of the same month the general renewed his motion, under the form of a resolution, “that the further continuance of an offensive war in America, for the purpose of subduing by force the revolted colonies, is totally impracticable.”

This motion was contested with great spirit, but much to the disadvantage of administration; and Sir William Dolbin, member for the University of Oxford, who had voted with General Conway on the former occasion, having now declared his intention to vote against him, raised a prodigious clamour, no less than four orators joining in attacking him for his inconsistency. Among these, was Sheridan, who never missed an opportunity of exercising his wit when he could display it with effect. The result of this night was a complete victory on the side of opposition, who carried their point by a majority of nineteen, and thus gave the decisive blow to the protraction of the American war. Ministers, however, still continued to hold their places most tenaciously, while they were goaded on from day to day by a powerful combination of numbers and talents. But though government obtained a majority of ten, against a string of resolutions proposed by Lord John Cavendish, to the same effect as the one which had been successful in the hands of General Conway, it was easy enough to see that the struggle was unequal, and that a surrender must quickly take place.

In reviewing this combat, one hardly knows which to admire most, the obstinate pertinacity of ministers, or the dexterous activity of their opponents; but the most unaccountable circumstance of all, is the conduct of the House of Commons, as a body, in supporting a proposition one day, and rejecting it

on another. On the last occasion, Mr. Sheridan availed himself, with his usual adroitness, of the embarrassed state of Lord North, and the awkward situation of his vacillating friends, in attacking them alike with the keen edge of his satire. In the course of his speech, he was ironically complaisant to Mr. Rigby, whom he praised as the Demosthenes of the house; but his principal object was the minister himself, of whom he spoke in terms of affected pity, asking "where would the noble Lord, on being hunted out of place, fly for refuge and protection? He would not dare to face the people, and therefore must endeavour to seek an asylum in the lonely woods or desolated towns of America."

At length, on the twentieth of March, Lord North came down to the house, and declared that he and his colleagues were no longer in power. In consequence of this resignation, a new administration was formed, of which the Marquis of Rockingham was ostensibly the head, as First Lord of the Treasury. Mr. Sheridan, on this change, obtained the appointment of Under Secretary of State for the Northern Department, which office, however, he held but a short time, for the death of the Marquis in July occasioned a breach in the cabinet of so serious a nature, that Mr. Fox and his immediate friends gave up their places. Various were the reasons assigned for this hasty measure: but though the seceders endeavoured to justify their con-

duct upon public principles, no doubt can be now entertained that the elevation of the Earl of Shelburne, afterwards Marquis of Lansdowne, to the vacant post of First Lord of the Treasury, was the real ground of the separation.

During the short period of his filling a situation under government, Mr. Sheridan could not have many opportunities of shewing his capacity for business; but he made no figure in the House of Commons as a member of administration; and the only speech of any importance delivered by him in that capacity was in answer to Mr. Eden's motion for leave to bring in a bill to repeal so much of the act of the sixth of George the First, as declares "that the parliament of Great Britain has an undoubted right, in all cases whatever, to make laws to bind Ireland."

Mr. Sheridan and his colleagues were indignant that Mr. Eden should presume to meddle with a concern which they desired to manage for themselves; and they vociferated as strongly upon the impropriety of his proceeding, as if they had been really hostile to the measure which he proposed.

While party spirit was thus running high, various societies were instituted for constitutional information, and to promote a reform in parliament, of which Sheridan became a leading member, in conjunction with the Earl of Surrey, the present Earl Grey, Mr. Fox, and numerous other persons of rank and talent. These societies were not con-

fined to the metropolis, but had many corresponding institutions all over the kingdom ; and for a time they were exceedingly popular, as having apparently a good end in view, which justified these means of effecting the object. There were, however, some intelligent men, even among the most patriotic members of the House of Commons, who contemplated these establishments with jealousy, and considered them as tending to public mischief, in the formation of a political confederacy, which might ultimately have an overbearing influence over the legislature.

Soon after the re-assembling of parliament, at the end of this year, Mr. Sheridan was involved in an unpleasant dilemma, being publicly charged in the House of Commons with a breach of confidence, in repeating, without authority, a private communication that had been made to him on the part of the Duke of Richmond. On the eleventh of December, in the committee of supply for the navy, the subject of the provisional articles of the treaty of peace was introduced, when Mr. Sheridan let fall an observation, in answer to Mr. Powis, that it was not only the First Lord of the Treasury who had given an explanation of those articles different from what had been stated in that house by ministers, but, that in a public company, where he had been a few days previous, a nobleman, namely the noble duke already mentioned, in whose words he placed more trust than in

those of the premier, had delivered an opinion exactly correspondent. This, Mr. Sheridan observed, was not a matter of private confidence; it was not mentioned as a secret; and, therefore, he felt himself at full liberty to make use of the explanation, and to advance it as an argument of caution to the members of that house how they hastily voted a war establishment on language so contradictory. The place he alluded to was in a meeting of a society for constitutional information; and in his report of the Duke's assertion he was corroborated by Sir Cecil Wray. Much disapprobation, however, was expressed at the disclosure, as having all the appearance of a breach of confidence, even though the matter revealed was correctly stated; and a few days afterwards Mr. Sheridan felt himself called upon, in his place, to enter into an exculpation of his conduct, which he did by asserting, that both he and Sir Cecil Wray had clearly understood the communication to be of a public nature; and not only so, but that they had the express permission of the Duke to mention it in the House of Commons.

Mr. Steel, in reply, said, that he had, in consequence of what occurred, mentioned this reported conversation to His Grace, who declared that he had given no leave whatever to have it noticed in parliament; which assertion was as flatly denied by Mr. Sheridan, who again maintained that positive authority was given by the Duke to

Sir Cecil Wray, to relate the discourse in the house. Thus ended an altercation, which was of no farther moment than as it evinced the loose ideas entertained by the most able men of the duties attached to the dignity of a senator, whether in or out of power. That the Duke of Richmond actually communicated what was reported of him cannot be doubted, for it was never called in question; but it is incredible to suppose that he had any thoughts of having his discourse brought up in the course of a public debate. Such a disclosure was calculated to sow divisions among political friends, and that at a time when unity and secrecy were indispensibly requisite. At all events, the imprudence of the Duke, in giving private information upon a matter of state then in agitation, was no justification of Mr. Sheridan in relating the fact, and in adducing his authority before the House of Commons, until he had the explicit sanction of His Grace for so doing.

On the fourteenth of February, 1783, Mr. Sheridan, for the first time, came into a direct contact with Mr. Pitt, who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer; and it is evident, on a review of the proceeding, that the attack was premeditated on the part of Sheridan, in an ambitious aim to cope with this extraordinary young man, whose powers, as an orator and statesman, were then the general theme of admiration. At the close of a debate on Mr. Eden's motion for the production

of copies of the powers under which the different negotiators on the late peace had acted, Mr. Sheridan entered upon a discussion of the preliminaries of peace, though the subject was not then before the house. He dwelt principally upon the state of the East, and our new acquisitions in that quarter, particularly Trincomale; and after an elaborate survey of the importance of that settlement, he moved, "that an humble address be presented to His Majesty, to request that he would order such part of the negotiations for peace, as respected our possessions in the East Indies, to be laid before the house."

The motion having been seconded by Mr. Fox, was combated in a strain of indignant eloquence by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who reprobated it as one of the most absurd, preposterous, and unparliamentary, that could possibly be conceived. "Indeed, of late," said Mr. Pitt, "it has been observed, that opposition has started against ministers in various new forms and shapes; but in no instance had it ever taken so unwarrantable a course as in the present. The motion contained a requisition to all usage in that house, to all precedent, and, indeed, to every degree of common sense and common understanding. He was surprised that so little attention should be paid to the forms of parliament in matters of this kind, as to demand, by motion, the express terms of preliminaries which were as yet unsigned, and

the private negotiations for a peace, the only leading principle to which was no more than a cessation of hostilities. Was the honourable member," asked the Chancellor, "so uninformed in the history of state affairs, as not to know that the very demand which he made was against the sacred oath and honour of the ministers concerned in the negotiation? The present motion tended to throw the government into a dilemma, let the answer to it be what it would, respecting Trincomale, and, therefore, could not be entertained. Negotiations for peace were always held to be of a secret nature; and parliament, until the present instance, had never insisted by motion, however they might have solicited by conversation, any insight into a business of this nature before it was finally concluded." Mr. Pitt hoped that every member would give him credit when he said that peace was not concluded with Holland: was the house, therefore, to enter upon a discussion of preliminaries that perhaps were not in existence, or, at least, that were not yet signed?—Surely not. That would be to decide upon an uncertainty, to call upon ministers for what perhaps they did not possess, and to demand from them an intention which it was probable they did not entertain. In such a doubtful case, it was the result of common sense, and the determination of long parliamentary practice, not to accede to so improper, unprecedented, and, he must again repeat it, so absurd a

motion. He therefore trusted, that when the honourable gentleman should have coolly and deliberately weighed the tendency of his motion, and when he saw on what firm and substantial grounds it was opposed, he would be induced to withdraw it, and leave the preliminaries to the constitutional mode of parliamentary inquiry."

It cannot be denied that Mr. Pitt, on this occasion, expressed himself with more passionate warmth than was necessary; but his youth, and the difficulty of his situation, may be pleaded as a sufficient excuse for the severity with which he treated a motion that had no other design than that of impeding ministers in their operations for the restoration of peace. Nothing could be more glaringly ridiculous than a proposition of this nature, which would, if carried into effect, have abridged the most essential prerogative of the crown; and thrown the power of controuling and regulating pending negotiations for peace into the hands of parliament. But though the arguments of Mr. Pitt could not be refuted, unluckily his intemperate ebullition in this instance laid him open to the attacks of his adversaries; and Mr. Fox first, and Mr. Sheridan afterwards, returned to the assault with new vigour, though not with any novelty of argument. The former vindicated the motion of his honourable friend, not upon the ground of established usage, for that was impossible, but upon the abstract principle of parliamen-

tary right, and as having for its object the benefit of the kingdom. This, to be sure, was a very convenient plea for justifying an irregularity, but it was only calculated to impose upon the populace; and it was such an one as any man might have made for the wildest project that ever started from the perturbed imagination of a fanatic, or the scheming brain of an incendiary. The public good is a pretext under which the most dangerous conceptions may acquire currency, and be carried into mischievous action. It was beneath such a man as Mr. Fox to rest the defence of this proceeding upon so vague and indeterminate a principle; but he was aware, probably, that the total want of reason and consistency in the measure rendered a fallacious use of words necessary for its vindication. Mr. Sheridan adopted another course; and though he slightly repelled the charge of having violated parliamentary order, he contented himself with animadverting upon Mr. Pitt's language and conduct in having recommended that temper to others of which he failed to set them an example. He then concluded with saying, that as his most ardent wish was to advance the prosperity of his country, he had only to lament that the same haughtiness of style which defended the ratification was not to be found in dictating the preliminaries of peace; and he advised the right honourable gentleman and his friends to reserve themselves for the approaching day of discussion,

when they would find full employment for all the spirits they possessed.

On the seventeenth of the same month the preliminary articles of peace came under consideration, when, as might have been expected from what had previously taken place, and the irritation which prevailed among all parties, a long and ardent contest ensued. Mr. Thomas Pitt, afterwards Lord Camelford, in a very able speech, moved an address to His Majesty, which was of course an entire approbation of the terms of the treaties that had been concluded. This address was seconded by Mr. Wilberforce, who endeavoured to shew that the peace was not so disadvantageous as from our situation might have been apprehended, and as the opposition laboured with abundantly more zeal than consistency to represent it. Lord John Cavendish moved an amendment, which tended to sweep away the address altogether; and at seven in the morning ministers were left in a minority, there being for the amendment two hundred and twenty-four, to two hundred and eight. In the course of this debate, Mr. Sheridan levelled some strong observations against Mr. Pitt, and, among other flights, which partook more of fancy than deliberation, he said, that if Mr. Fox had framed so disgraceful a treaty, he would have opposed it with as much zeal as he manifested in the present instance. The Chancellor of the Exchequer could not well avoid taking some

notice of the personal sarcasms that had been directed to him; but it was lamented by his best friends that he descended *infra dignitatem*, in combating with his antagonist, by adopting the same language of ridicule which he had resented. Alluding to Sheridan's dramatic connexions and pursuits: — "No man," said he, "admired more than he did the abilities of the honourable gentleman, the elegant sallies of his thought, the gay effusions of his fancy, his dramatic turns, his epigrammatic points; and if they were reserved for the proper stage, they would no doubt receive what the honourable gentleman's abilities always did receive, the plaudits of the audience; and it would be his fortune, *sui plausu, gaudere theatri*. But this was not the proper scene for the exhibition of these elegancies; and he therefore must beg leave to call the attention of the house to the serious consideration of the very important question before them."

Mr. Sheridan, in explanation, adverted in a forcible manner to this personality, saying, "He need not comment on it, as the propriety, the taste, and the gentlemanly point of it must have been obvious to the house. But," added he, "let me assure the right honourable gentleman, that I do now, and will at any time when he chuses to repeat this sort of allusion, meet it with the most sincere good humour; nay, I will say more:—flattered and encouraged by the right honourable

gentleman's panegyric on my talents, if ever I again engage in the composition he alludes to, I may be tempted to an act of presumption, to attempt, with an improvement, on one of Ben Jonson's best characters, that of the angry boy in the *Alchymist*."

This reciprocity of sarcastic ridicule occasioned much sport at the period; and the whimsical application of Sheridan's dramatic reading fixed upon his opponent an appellation which he did not get rid of for many years.

Soon after the division against the address on the peace, Lord Shelburne out of resentment gave in his resignation; but Mr. Pitt still continued in the discharge of the duties of his office several weeks, solely with a view to the public good, and for which he received the acknowledgments of Burke and Fox, who, at the same time, animadverted in strong language upon the conduct of the noble earl for leaving his post in so irregular a manner. But his lordship was so chagrined at the political intrigues which were then openly carried on between his old friends and Lord North, that he was resolved to give them as much trouble as possible; though it has also been said, that he was himself at this very time extremely solicitous for a union with the same nobleman, whose interest still continued to be great both in parliament and with the sovereign. As, however, Lord Shelburne was not willing to relinquish his supre-

macy in the cabinet, and Mr. Fox was ready to form a junction on equal terms, the proposal of the latter was more acceptable to Lord North, who had also some dread of the transcendent powers of Mr. Pitt.

It may naturally be supposed that Mr. Sheridan was not an inattentive observer of these transactions; but he was the follower of Mr. Fox, whose cause he asserted with great vehemence in political clubs, and in various publications. One of these journals, called "The Englishman," was under his immediate direction; and another, still more directly levelled against Lord Shelburne, was set up at his instance, by Wilkie the bookseller. This paper was entituled "The Jesuit," but, after running to eighteen numbers, it was suppressed on account of its libellous tendency, and a prosecution was instituted against the publisher. When the minister resigned, and the coalition came in, this prosecution still went on, and Mr. Wilkie, being convicted, was sentenced to an imprisonment of twelve months; which he endured, though his own friends and patrons were then in power. Gratitude has little place in the code of political moralists; and so the printer found to his cost; for his old friends, of whom Mr. Sheridan was the principal, not only allowed the information to proceed against him, but suffered him to bear the penalty to its fullest extent, and to endure besides all the expense of the prosecution. The "Jesuit" has been ascribed to

the pen of Sheridan, by most of the writers who have professed to give memoirs of him; but in this they have been all mistaken; for though the paper was undertaken by his advice, and was supported, during its short existence, by his party, he never wrote one paragraph in any of the numbers.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Coalition.—Explanatory Defence of it by Sheridan.—Justification of it by Dr. Parr.—Remarks.—Sheridan suspected of a Financial Job.—His Sentiments on a Reform in Parliameat.—His Vindication of the Tax on Receipts.—India Bill of Mr. Fox.—Change of Ministers.

ON the second of April, 1783, Mr. Sheridan came into office, as Secretary of the Treasury, in conjunction with Mr. Richard Burke, the Recorder of Bristol, the Duke of Portland being nominally the Prime Minister, though, in reality, that dignity, as to every effective purpose, rested in Lord North and Mr. Fox, who were joint secretaries of state. This coalition of persons, who had been for so many years at direct variance on every public question, and between whom it was scarcely to be credited that any uniformity of political opinion could subsist, occasioned a sensation of astonishment and indignation throughout the kingdom.

It required no ordinary skill to frame any thing like an apology for so unnatural a union; and Mr. Fox, whose abilities were of the first order, failed most miserably in his attempt to justify the alliance which he had made. There was, indeed,

something highly ludicrous in the sorrow which he expressed for the indecent violence of his former opposition to the noble lord with whom he was now associated. He then endeavoured to shelter himself and his colleague under the sanction of example, and adduced, among other instances, the junction that had been formed between the Duke of Richmond and Lord Thurlow, notwithstanding the acrimonious language which had passed between those noblemen. This, however, was a very lame defence of the right honourable secretary, who had invariably affected to oppose Lord North upon principle; and yet, at the very time that the coalition took place, the political doctrines of both these statesmen were unchanged. The war with America was indeed at an end, but the sentiments of the noble lord on that subject remained the same; and there were other radical principles of constitutional import, in which he differed *toto cælo* from his old antagonist and new ally.

Mr. Sheridan's wit and eloquence proved more effectual in the defence of this measure than the apology of Mr. Fox; though even his ingenious statement and sophistical reasoning were far enough from giving general satisfaction. He confessed, that when the idea of a coalition with Lord North was first mentioned, he had advised his right honourable friend not to accept of it, and his reason for so dissuading him was this, that as he had ac-

quired a great popularity in the country, it was to be dreaded that he would lose it by such a step. It was natural to suppose that a connexion so contrary to all former professions would disgust many respectable friends, and raise prejudices too strong to be combated. Similar objections, said Mr. Sheridan, would no doubt occur to the friends of the noble lord; and he had reason to believe that such arguments against the coalition were urged to him by the persons who were most in his confidence. Mutual diffidence between men, long in the habit of contending publicly, might naturally be expected. The prejudices of the people were also to be taken into the account, as operating powerfully to forbid the alliance. The middling classes of society, for whom Mr. Sheridan professed to entertain the greatest respect, and to whom, sooner than the more elevated ranks, the House of Commons must ever look for support in cases of emergency, were certainly not the best qualified to judge of nice and refined points of politics: accustomed to appreciate the value of measures by their opinion of men, he apprehended that they would not give themselves time to examine the principles, motives, and grounds of a coalition; but would condemn it on its first appearance, merely because it was composed of persons who had long been political enemies. On these grounds, therefore, and full of tender apprehension for the character

of his right honourable friend, he had most certainly given him his advice against the coalition. But having made this candid statement, he proceeded to say, that when the necessities of the times, at last, pointed the measure out as the only means of saving the country, and when, from the opportunities he had of seeing the noble lord and his friends, he was fully convinced of their honour and the liberality of their conduct, not only did he cease to condemn the coalition, but he rejoiced that it had taken place even in spite of his caution and advice. It was needless, therefore, after this, to assure the house that his confidence in his right honourable friend had not suffered the smallest diminution; for being thoroughly well acquainted with his exalted character, he knew that he looked down with perfect indifference, if not with absolute contempt, upon riches, places, and dignities, as things by no means conducive to happiness. It was the ambition of his right honourable friend to merit and preserve the esteem and confidence of his friends, and he was sure that he would sacrifice neither for all that power and emolument could bestow.

Such was the pleading of Mr. Sheridan in the behalf of a connexion that could only be justified upon the plea of public good, and accordingly that necessity he claimed as its legitimate ground, but, unfortunately for his cause, without producing a single proof to shew that the necessity existed.

It was easy, indeed, to say that the salvation of the country depended upon a combination of this nature, but it required a face of peculiar hardihood to advance so glaring a fallacy in a public assembly, where the assertion, instead of making a favourable impression, was sure to excite ridicule.

The strong and ardent mind of Dr. Parr was as much gruelled in devising an argument for this celebrated junction as the fertile imagination of his friend Sheridan. In his once celebrated preface to the republication of Bellendenus, he says, "Whatever has been objected to the coalition, and however frequently this has been echoed by the tongues of unprincipled men, it will never make an impression either on Fox or North forcible enough to make them repent of having buried their former enmities in oblivion. If their sentiments have, in some instances, submitted to change, they still defy the imputation of inconstancy. When the state had in a manner expired, from the oppression of a calamitous and fatal war, they considered, with the cool deliberation of reason, not only what was expedient for the public good, but what was most becoming and honourable for themselves. They were of opinion, the wounds of that war could then alone be healed, when a solid, consistent union of all the virtuous could be effected, even by violent means, from the various sentiments and prejudices of a divided and distracted nation. They exerted them-

selves to lay the foundation of domestic tranquillity. They followed the example of the Athenians of old; and determined that the very remembrance of ancient animosities should be buried in everlasting oblivion. They failed in their object, not from any depravity of their own, but from their own ideas of their duty, and the extraordinary predicament of the state. They pursued the conduct by which Æmilius Lepidus and Fulvius Flaccus formerly obtained universal applause. One thing alone gives me the most serious and painful concern, which is, that they did not imitate the conduct of Themistocles and Aristides; that a patriotic principle did not, during the progress of the war, conciliate and unite them together. Enmities have been formed which would admit of justification, even between citizens of deserving character; but having been consigned to oblivion, I could not imagine that any individual, attached to the interests of his country, could, without provocation, indulge a spirit of hostility against Mr. Fox, whose patriotic principles had been sufficiently conspicuous.”*

The reader of plain sense, who takes the trouble of stripping this parade of learning of its exuberant foliage, will detect the rotten cause it was intended to cover. A consciousness of imbecility to

* Gulielmi Bellendeni de Statu: in præfatio. p. xcii. ed. Lond. 1787.

advocate an incongruous association runs through all this empty declamation, in which nothing is said to shew that either the times or the men had undergone such a change as to give a colourable pretext for the coalition. No doubt, it is always commendable to bury animosities of every kind in oblivion; but such a consignment, instead of furnishing an excuse for a partnership between men who have long been distinguished as political enemies, would, in that case, only tend to bring their sincerity into general suspicion, and, of course, to weaken that confidence which the people ought to have in their principles. When it is seen that they who have been long accustomed to charge ministers with want of humanity and integrity, make no scruple afterwards to coalesce with the same persons for the purpose of getting into power, it will be very natural and pardonable for the people to call in question the honesty of both parties. It is treating the public with very little respect to say, that there is an incompetency in the majority to understand the grounds and reasons for such associations and changes. Such an assertion, however, was made by Mr. Sheridan, and it was afterwards repeated from him by Dr. Parr, though both would have reprobated that language in terms of keen asperity, had it proceeded from an opposite quarter, in justification of a measure which it was their policy to decry. Mr. Fox had often declared his intention

of impeaching Lord North for his conduct during the American war; and yet, when that war was ended, though the consequences remained to press heavily upon the nation, no inquiry was made into the cause of the evil; but, on the contrary, the champion of the people, as he was called, condescended to court an alliance with the very man whose head he had threatened to bring to the block.

Here then was a vital change in the principles of Mr. Fox and his friends, though the same cannot be said of his noble colleague, who recanted nothing of his political creed, nor expressed any other concern for what had occurred in the struggle to subjugate America than what arose from the failure of his exertions. So far then Lord North stood free from any reproach, on account of his inconsistency: but the case was far otherwise with regard to his new allies, who evidently abandoned their own ground to join him upon motives of convenience and interest. Much, indeed, may be said for the noble lord, who, in some measure, stood in need of protection after having experienced so much ill success in the management of an unpopular war; but this very excuse, on his part, was a bitter censure upon those who, after having done all that they could to hold him up as an object of execration during the war, were ambitious of the honour of his alliance in the time of peace.

Nothing, therefore, could warrant the editor of Bellendenus in stigmatizing the enemies of this

coalition with the opprobrious and scurrilous epithet of *improborum hominum*, or “unprincipled men;” for, among those who condemned the measure altogether, were many of the old associates of Mr. Fox; and it might have been safely said, that the great body of the people regarded it with abhorrence, of which, indeed, a stronger proof could hardly be given than the labour and ingenuity employed in its defence.

Soon after the accession of the new ministry, it was found necessary to apply for a loan of twelve millions; on which occasion, it being suspected that some persons connected with the government had availed themselves of their situation to profit by the bargain, Mr. Rolle, then member for the county of Devon, moved for a list of the subscribers. This motion was immediately seconded from the treasury bench; and Mr. Sheridan, of whose concern in the transaction some whispers had been circulated, thought proper to rise for the purpose of clearing his own honour and that of his colleagues, which he did, by assuring the honourable member that the list moved for could not be a greater novelty to any man in the house than it would be to him; for knowing the character of the noble lord at the head of the exchequer (Lord John Cavendish), he did not venture so much as to recommend a single person to him for a share in the loan.

On the seventh of May, this year, Mr. Pitt made his famous speech on a motion for a reform in the representation of the House of Commons. It was strongly opposed by Mr. Powys and Lord North; but though Mr. Fox did not venture to vote against a measure which he had formerly espoused with great animation, it was evident that his zeal had now cooled in a considerable degree. Sheridan, indeed, entered into the subject with his wonted ardour, and delivered his opinion with great frankness in favour of the motion, which he thought should have been carried much farther, particularly to the extent of shortening the duration of parliaments. This abridgment he considered as the only radical cure of the great vice in the representation, because, hereby the intercourse and connexion between the members and their constituents would be drawn closer, while the former, knowing the precarious nature of the tenure, would be more attentive to their trust.

The argument, no doubt, is specious, but it wants solidity, for in short parliaments little business could be accomplished; and though it is probable that the members might see their constituents oftener, they would understand their own duty less. Legislation requires study and deliberation, the labour of patient inquiry, and the exercise of an unbiased judgment, which would be rendered impossible in short meetings, where

multifarious concerns of great moment must be continually pressing for the decision of those who have no time to examine into their merits.

Parliamentary reform has an alluring sound to those who consider human institutions abstractedly, and who take particular defects or unavoidable peculiarities for positive evils. The English constitution is not a work of theoretical ingenuity; and of the representative system, which may be said to form its greatest glory, it would be impossible to trace the foundation. A change in the construction of this system must be necessarily attended with the diminution of its dignity and the depression of its power; for that which is subjected to capricious alteration becomes less venerable in the estimation of those who are bound to respect its authority. Whatever inequalities there may be in this constitution, they are more than compensated for by the stability on which it rests; the practical benefits which flow from its operation; and the essential security hereby afforded to all orders of the community. That stability, however, would be shaken by innovation, and evils would pour in through the breach, which no regulation of long standing, nor any precedent of parliamentary usage, would be able to controul. The motives of the eminent persons, whose talents have been exerted in recommending a reform of the House of Commons, are entitled to more credit than either their judgment or prudence. Mr. Pitt

at this time lost his motion by a great majority, and afterwards he abandoned the scheme altogether, for which he has been honoured with the opprobrious epithet of Apostate, by those who seem to have adopted it as a maxim, that political error is never to be abandoned when the retraction tends to cross public prejudices, and, of course, to endanger popularity. Though Mr. Pitt afterwards renewed his proposition for parliamentary reform, it should be considered that his views of the subject were very different from those entertained and advocated by headstrong theorists, who would put the constitution into jeopardy, for the sake of trying their projects upon the most essential but delicate parts of the system.

The maturity of years and experience convinced this great man that representation cannot be perfect; that, in what hands soever the elective power is vested, corruption will unavoidably arise; and that no alteration could, upon the whole, produce assemblies of more talents and patriotism, private worth and public virtue, than what are now regularly convened in the Imperial Parliament of the United Kingdom.

Among the new taxes proposed by the ministry this year, one of the most obnoxious to the trading interest was that upon receipts, which, however, was carried, after considerable opposition. Mr. Sheridan defended the tax with great wit and humour against several speakers; but he was

particularly sarcastic in reply to Mr. Coke, who had suggested as a substitute for it a tax upon tombstones, which, he observed, could meet with no objection. This was too fair an object for the display of that sarcastic irony in which Sheridan delighted, and excelled, to be avoided; and he said, very gravely, "that the reason why the proposed tax upon tombstones could not be objected to, was, because those out of whose property it was to be paid would know nothing of the matter, as they must be dead before the demand could be made. But then," added he, "after all, who knows but that it may not be rendered unpopular in being represented as a tax upon persons, who, having paid the debt of nature, must prove that they have so done, by having the receipt engraved upon their tombs."

In the debates which occurred upon the affairs of India at this period, Mr. Sheridan only took an occasional and very subordinate part, sometimes interjecting a few lively sallies to relieve the tediousness of discussion, and at others, animadverting in terms of general asperity upon the government of our eastern territories. He did not, indeed, vote at the second reading of the famous bill of Mr. Fox, for taking the management of our Indian possessions out of the hands of the company, and vesting it in seven commissioners appointed by parliament; but, whatever was the cause of his absence on that occasion, the measure

itself received his approbation, and he had his share in framing it for public consideration. This celebrated bill, however, proved a death-blow to his party; for though it was carried triumphantly in the lower house, it was rejected by the upper, and generally execrated throughout the kingdom. Whatever abuses and oppression the proposed establishment was calculated to correct abroad, it was obvious to the plainest understanding that the result would have been the creation of a more formidable despotism at home. In the event of its success, the crown must have sunk into a state of insignificant dependence upon the House of Commons, while the minister, for the time being, would have obtained a complete ascendancy over both. It was a blended act of rapacity, treachery, and ambition, seizing, without any return, the property of individuals, trampling upon chartered rights, and appropriating the plunder to the consolidation of a powerful party into an estate uncontrollable by the throne or the people. The plan, however, was too gigantic and portentous to pass without creating alarm, even in its infant state; and the tyrannical features which it disclosed, while yet in embryo, excited universal abhorrence and apprehension. No rhetorical declamation on the dangerous condition of our oriental states, nor any exaggerated description of the calamities produced there by the vicious satellites of a mercenary government, could throw a veil over the defor-

mities of this abortive mass, which was gendered without honour, and brought forth without feeling.

In this emergency, the sovereign considered his prerogative as identified with the wishes and the welfare of the nation. Justly indignant, therefore, at the conduct of ministers, he dismissed them in a manner that could not fail to wound their pride, though it had not the effect of making them either humble or penitent. On the contrary, their violence increased when their power was taken away; and, being no longer able to carry on a favourite scheme of aggrandizement, they were driven to the desperate resolution of avenging themselves upon the throne, for the disgrace with which they were covered in the presence of all the people. They complained bitterly of injustice, for not having been suffered to commit extensive wrong with impunity; and they affected to talk loudly of secret influence who had themselves been guilty of all the arts of deception.

CHAPTER IX.

Official Negligence.—Violence of Opposition.—Parliamentary Acrimony.—Struggle between the Commons and the Crown.—Activity and Wit of Sheridan.—Dissolution of Parliament.—Return for Stafford.—Westminster Election.—Sketch of Biography.—Humorous Debate on the Horse Tax.—Political Horn Book.—Technical Advantage over the Minister.—Satirical Advice given to Mr. Fox and his Friends.

THUS Mr. Sheridan was again dismissed to the ranks of opposition, after enjoying a situation of great respectability little more than eight months, during which he is said to have paid so very little attention to the duties of the office, that a pasquinade was placed upon the door of the Treasury to this effect, that no applications were received on Sundays, nor any business done there the rest of the week.

But however negligent any of that party might be in place, they were all active enough when in opposition. Various meetings were held for the purpose of thwarting the government in every measure; and to so great a length was this spirit of resistance carried by the dismissed ministers and their friends, that they resolved to exert their influence in withholding the supplies, till they should have forced the crown to a compliance

with their demands. Relying upon their numbers in the lower house, they felt confident of a speedy and complete victory; which assurance deprived them of the prudential caution that was necessary to guard them against farther disgrace. The country was placed in a fearful situation; and a universal anxiety was excited by this strange conflict between a formidable phalanx, constituting the majority of the Commons, and the other two branches of the legislature. Never since the sanguinary period of the great rebellion did the fierce spirit of democracy make greater strides upon the royal prerogative than at this gloomy season: but on the side of the crown the contest was purely defensive; while on that of the malcontents it was a struggle for absolute power.

Hostilities commenced immediately after the recess with remarkable acrimony, the whole body of the opposition endeavouring to run down Mr. Pitt, who was then avowedly at the head of administration; and in this they anticipated a certain triumph, on account of his youth, and the force with which he had to contend. Mr. Sheridan, at this time, did not fall short of his friends in warmth of zeal and intemperance of language: but the firmness of the minister in resisting all the arts of persuasion, the taunts of irony, and the vehemence of personal abuse, filled his antagonists with astonishment and indignation. They charged him with having obtained his situation by

intrigue, and maintaining it in opposition to the constitutional will of the people as expressed by a vote of the House of Commons. To all this he stood alike indifferent; and conscious of his own integrity, as well as sensible of the vast importance of the post which he had to defend, he towered above his enemies, and resolutely persevered in holding on his course, notwithstanding the political strife in which he was so unequally engaged. It is painful to review the coarseness of phrase and acerbity of temper which broke forth during these stormy debates. On one occasion Mr. Sheridan descended so low as to express himself in a manner that plainly evinced the writhings of disappointment and the bitterness of resentment. "How shuffling," said he, "is this conduct in a young minister, unhackneyed in the ways of men! This is an instance of duplicity scarce to be paralleled by the most hoary hypocrite that ever guided the councils of a great nation. If, in the very outset, this young minister thus tramples on the constitution, what may you not expect or apprehend from the audacity of his riper years?" Here the wit of Sheridan was evidently lost in the fury of his anger; and the contemptuous ridicule which he bestowed upon the juvenility of the minister, was, in fact, the greatest compliment that even passion or humour could have bestowed upon him. The orator was a little more felicitous in his attack upon Mr. Dundas, who, in the course of the same debate,

had noticed the misrepresented saying of Lee, the Attorney-General, that "a charter was only a skin of parchment with a piece of wax dangling to it," and which had given rise to a caricature, describing "an Attorney-General as being only a carcase dangling at the end of a rope." Here Sheridan indulged his sportive powers to a great extent, and observed, that instead of the Attorney-General dangling at the end of a rope, the likeness of Mr. Dundas would be more appropriate, with a label from his mouth, expressing an appeal from the parliament to the people; or, rather, he might be drawn, after his dismissal from office, as stretched upon a bed of torture, with a label hanging out of his pocket, bearing this inscription, "the martyr of the chartered rights of mankind:" and, as a contrast to it, another might issue from his mouth, with the title of his own India Bill, "The Government of India." These witticisms, which kept the house in a roar of laughter for a considerable time, were followed up by a very apt allusion to some passages in the journals respecting the conduct of Sir Richard Temple, in the reign of Charles the Second. The notoriety of secret influence over the councils of England at that period was matter of history that could not be questioned; but the readiness of Sheridan, on this occasion, consisted in an indirect attack upon Earl Temple, who lay under a suspicion of having acted the same intriguing character at the court

of George the Third as Sir Richard had performed in that of the Second Charles; "but," said the wit, "the last mentioned agent happened to be only in progress to nobility, and was a simple baronet, not a peer." Having thus exercised his ingenuity at the expense of the new ministers, Mr. Sheridan took a discursive view of the prerogative of the crown, and the privileges of the commons, in which range of illustration from the volumes of history he endeavoured to support a curious position, advanced a little before by Mr. Fox, "that the practice of our constitution is more perfect than the theory."

Some well-meaning attempts were made, by several independent members, to bring about another coalition upon an extensive basis, but without effect; for the leaders of the opposition were inflexibly bent upon carrying their measure for engrossing the government of India, and not willing that the concern should lie in any other hands than their own. On the other side, ministers saw very little chance of bringing their opponents to moderation by concession; and it was evident that such a compromise as the one proposed, though it might allay the present tempest, could not prevent greater schisms. In a debate, upon an address to the throne, moved by Mr. Coke for the purpose of such a conciliation, Lord Mulgrave treated it with ridicule, and compared the proceedings of the house to those of the Whigs in the reign of King William,

whom they addressed for a removal of his ministers, saying, "Put these men from you, or your crown will be in danger."

Mr. Sheridan, in reply to his lordship, observed, that, according to the principles now laid down, it was of no consideration with His Majesty to appoint ministers who should possess the confidence of the House of Commons. "A junction with the King and Commons," he supposed, "the noble lord would account an act of political adultery; but a union of the crown with the lords would be a legal marriage."

At length, when it was found that nothing short of an unconditional surrender of the regal prerogative would satisfy the refractory party, who thought themselves securely entrenched in their majorities, His Majesty followed the plain advice of Lord Thurlow, and dissolved the parliament, "trusting," as he said in his speech from the throne, "that this measure would tend to obviate the mischiefs arising from the unhappy divisions and distractions which have lately subsisted; and that the various important objects, which will require consideration, may be afterwards proceeded upon with less interruption, and with happier effect."

Mr. Sheridan, and his friend, the Honourable Edward Monckton, experienced no difficulty in their re-election for Stafford; but in Westminster a scene of unparalleled confusion occurred, where Mr. Fox was opposed by Sir Cecil Wray, who

had been formerly his colleague and friend, but who was now supported by the whole weight of the treasury influence. During the contest, which lasted above six weeks, Mr. Sheridan exerted himself with the greatest zeal in the service of his friend, by personally canvassing in his favour, sitting on the committees, and writing many of the pasquinades which were circulated on that occasion. In these temporary squibs he was very severe upon the ministers and their candidate; but about this time his own picture was drawn with a force of colouring equal to his own caustic severity of style, in a book entitled "The Royal Register," purporting to be sketches of remarkable characters, delineated by the first personage in the kingdom. After some general observations upon the modern mode of forming and conducting an opposition, the author says, "It could not happen in any country but England, that a young man, the son of a player, who had exhibited with his father as an oratorical lecturer, and afterwards married the daughter of a musician, should refuse, though in very distressed circumstances, to let his wife sing at a royal concert, and at an enormous salary, because it would degrade his character as a *gentleman* :

"That this *gentleman*, after having written a successful piece or two at one theatre, should find the means of raising sufficient sums of money to become the purchaser of a considerable share in

another, and afterwards the chief proprietor of a third :

“ That this *author* and *manager*, having, by the success and merit of his productions, established his character as a man of wit, and by his wife’s concerts made an acquaintance with the fashionable world, should live in a style of elegance and expense, that would soon beggar a large fortune :

“ That this *man of fashion*, being so embarrassed as not to find the most common credit, and apprehensive even of fatal inconveniency to his public property, should desert the comic muse for politics ; contrive, with the last guinea of a borrowed purse, to get elected into parliament, and set up, at once, for an active politician, exclaiming against placemen and ministers, and boasting the loudest zeal for patriot integrity and public virtue :

“ That this *upright senator*, after having been very generally blackballed at some of the fashionable clubs, having no money to lose, and being the object of real dislike to some very respectable members of one of those societies, should be able to prevail on men of rank and fashion to concern themselves in a very pitiful and dirty artifice, to secure a clandestine admission for him :

“ That this *worthy member of Brookes’s*, by his utility, as an active member of parliament, and other little qualifications, useful in the runner of a faction, should, in a change of public men, be

at length appointed to a place of real ostensibility, and, living in defiance of all economy himself, become an economist for the nation.

“Such a little progressive biographical history is peculiar to Old England; a country favourable beyond all others to the **POLITICAL ADVENTURER.**”

In the first sitting of the new parliament, much time was taken up on the subject of the Westminster election, and on the conduct of the high-bailiff in granting a scrutiny, and neglecting to make a return until it should be ended. Mr. Sheridan approved himself throughout this business a very useful and zealous friend to Mr. Fox, whose rights he supported with equal spirit and ability, against what he denominated the usurped authority of the high-bailiff, and the tyranny of the minister. He was, indeed, a very powerful antagonist of Mr. Pitt at this period, and missed no opportunity of assailing him with as much personal invective as the privileges of the house would allow. On one occasion, however, he drew an acknowledgment from the minister, which evinced, that whatever might be the warmth of their language, it was not the effect of private enmity. In a committee of ways and means, the proposed tax upon horses came under consideration, upon which, Lord Surrey, afterwards Duke of Norfolk, suggested as an improvement a tax upon winning horses, as well as upon those that should start for the plate.

Mr. Pitt instantly caught the idea, and adopted it, in addition to his own proposition, and not by way of a substitute; upon which Mr. Sheridan rose, and after some witty remarks, said that the right honourable gentleman had proved that a light rider had the best chance of winning the match, since he had left the noble lord behind him. This contrast between the thin and spare form of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the jolly rotundity of his lordship, produced full effect, and elicited a general laugh; after which, the orator proceeded to assure his noble friend, that when he returned to the sporting gentlemen who would be affected by this new impost, instead of admiring him for his spirit, they would most probably exclaim, very feelingly,

“Jocky of Norfolk, be not too bold.”

In the same sportive vein of good-humour, his lordship said he was happy to find the knowing ones had been taken in during this heat, and that he thought the right honourable gentleman had distanced him, and fairly won the plate.

After some other pleasantries of a like kind, the minister said he believed this was the first time that so dull a business as a committee of ways and means was ever concluded with such a lively epilogue as that of Sheridan, to whom, as well as to Lord Surrey, he sincerely desired to return his

thanks for the assistance he had derived from their experience.

There was, indeed, no subject too dry and uninteresting for the fertile genius and ready wit of Sheridan, who could contrive to enliven the most tedious debate at any time by his poignant remarks and humorous sallies. Thus, when the India Bill of Mr. Pitt was brought up from the committee, and read on the twenty-sixth of July, Mr. Sheridan observed that twenty-one new clauses were added, which were to be known by the letters of the alphabet from A to W; therefore, he hoped that some gentleman of ability would invent three more for X, Y, and Z, to complete the alphabet, which would then render the bill a perfect horn-book for the use of the minister, and the instruction of rising politicians.

On the sixth of August, Mr. Pitt found himself under the necessity of entering into a vindication of his conduct, in proposing to fund six millions of the navy debt, but which had excited so much alarm among the holders of navy bills, as to compel him, reluctantly, to abandon a measure which he was still persuaded was founded in justice, and calculated to be extremely beneficial. This drew on a very acrimonious debate, in which Mr. Fox went so far as to charge his great rival with childish ignorance, and an imbecility of intellect. The adherents of the minister retorted with equal asperity, and, among the rest, Mr. Rose threw out

some very strong animadversions upon the negligence of the late administration, who had left the public business worse than they found it. Mr. Sheridan, feeling the charge as one in which he was particularly implicated, replied to Mr. Rose, by saying, "that it was laudable in his friends to have done what they did, as, instead of finding plans of business already adjusted to their hands, they found no monuments of their predecessors, but large pensions and empty satchels."

On the twelfth of the same month Sheridan gained a slight advantage over the minister, by a technical objection to the bill then brought in for registering qualifications to kill game. Mr. Pitt did all that he could to remove the obstacle which had been thrown in his way; but the Speaker having decided that the bill could not proceed in its present shape, the amendments of Mr. Sheridan were agreed to, and the act was passed that session. At the same time Mr. Sheridan rendered an essential service to the manufacturers of hats, in the country, by prevailing upon government to alter the bill then introduced, obliging every such trader to take out a license yearly, and which, it was intended, should be ten shillings; but, upon a representation of the hardship, was reduced to half the sum.

This stormy session was closed on the part of opposition by Mr. Sheridan, who entered into a very long and elaborate enquiry into the receipts

and expenditures of the Civil List, at different periods, for the purpose of justifying the conduct of his party, when in power, from a charge of prodigality which had been brought against that administration; and he concluded with moving two resolutions: the first, "that a plan and estimate of the Civil List should be prepared to be laid before parliament:" and the next, "that in all future accounts of the receipts and disbursements of the Civil List a balance should be struck from the gross amount of the respective sums enumerated in the several quarters." This speech, and the resolutions, were combated with great ability by Mr. Rose, who maintained, without being contradicted, that when the late ministry went out of office, short as their time had been, they left the Civil List forty-four thousand pounds in arrear. On this representation, and the acknowledgment of Mr. Fox that he was totally ignorant of the business of the treasury, the resolutions were negatived without a division.

Thus the great leader of the opposition, who at the commencement of the year seemed to hold the government at his disposal, fell into a state of comparative insignificance. The transition, indeed, was so remarkable, and almost ludicrous, that some of the wits of his own party could not resist the impulse of treating it in a burlesque strain of ridicule. One of the happiest effusions on the subject was written by a very ingenious gentle-

man, who always voted with Mr. Fox; but at the end of this session addressed an epistle to him, in which he advised the patriot to open a tabernacle, in the confidence that,

“ Proud of a Methodist like thee,
The vulgar shall not there resort;
But lords and dames of high degree,
The splendid sinners of a court.”

After a whimsical description of the effects naturally resulting from the potent eloquence of the inspired orator, his facetious friend proceeded to allot to each of the distinguished members of the coalition their respective departments in the new conventicle.

“ How spruce will North beneath thee sit!
With joy officiate as thy clerk;
Attune the hymn, renounce his wit,
And carol like the morning lark.
Or, if thy potent length of pray’r
By chance induce a kindly doze,
Wake in the nick, with accent clear,
To cry Amen! and bless the close.”

The destination of Sheridan was equally appropriate and characteristic:

“ To comic Richard, ever true,
Be it assign’d the curs to lash;
With ready hand to ope the pew,
With ready hand to take the cash.”

CHAPTER X.

Death of Miss Maria Linley.—Elegiac Verses by Mrs. Sheridan.—Westminster Scrutiny.—Irish Propositions.—Tour in Lancashire, and its Consequences.—Authors of the Rolliad, and Probationary Odes.—Strange Infatuation of the Irish People.—Rejection of the Fortification System.—Opposition to the Sinking Fund.—Humorous Speech on Tax Bills.—Charges against Mr. Hastings.

WHILE Mr. Sheridan was engaged in the heat of political contest, and exercising his powers either in public debate, or in private consultations with his associates at their various clubs, his amiable partner was enduring the severe agony of domestic affliction. In quick succession she lost two accomplished brothers, who were in the very prime of life; and scarcely had she poured forth her sorrows over their untimely grave, before she was called upon to lament the death of her favourite sister, who expired at Bath on the fifth of September, 1784, while singing Handel's exquisite and soul-enlivening anthem, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Kindred genius and uniformity of temper had closely cemented these two lovely women in the sweetest bond of affection; and a more convincing testimony of the amity that subsisted between them could not be given than in the following lines, which Mrs. Sheridan wrote upon this melancholy occasion:—

VERSES TO THE MEMORY OF MY BELOVED SISTER,
MARIA LINLEY.

Twice* hath the sorrowing muse her tribute paid,
And the sad call of mourning love obey'd :
Again in cypress wreaths she veils her lyre,
And milder grief her plaintive strains inspire :
Again she comes to soothe my lonely hours,
And strew the untimely grave with weeping flowers ;
Sweet half-blown buds, cropt in their earliest bloom,
Fit emblems to adorn Maria's tomb :
The fair, the young Maria ! she whose song
Charm'd to mute rapture the admiring throng ;
Whose smiling loveliness all hearts subdu'd ;
Whose gentle accents fond attention woo'd.
Mourn, Beauty, mourn ! No more with wanton pride,
Boast your bright charms with orient crimson dy'd ;
Let sad reflection pleasure's dream supply,
And tremble in the tear that dims your eye.
Such charms on sweet Maria were bestow'd ;
There innocence and health united glow'd :
So shone the soften'd lustre of her eyes ;
Such were the dazzling beams of glad surprise.
Ye too, whose gentler souls confess the pow'r
Of heavenly harmony, her loss deplore ;
Whose notes, enchanting, struck with magic art
On all the soft vibrations of the heart.
Oh ! let your dying strains to heaven be borne,
And imitate the excellence you mourn :
So shall the angel spirit downward bend,
And towards the friends she lov'd her arms extend,

* Alluding to the untimely death of my dear brothers,
Thomas and Samuel.

Pitying the sorrows we are doom'd to bear,
And vainly wishing us her bliss to share.
While thus my tears with these sad numbers flow,
Still fondly cherishing my pleasing woe;
While thus my lov'd Maria's form I trace,
Her animated look, her native grace;
I soothe the grief I wish not to subdue,
And all her sweet perfections still renew.

Mr. Linley also felt these shocks so very poignantly, that his tears frequently fell upon the keys of his harpsichord in the orchestra, when any of the airs were sung in which his Maria had excelled; and sometimes he was obliged abruptly to quit the instrument, till the paroxysm of grief had subsided. The death of this young lady was severely felt by the musical world in general, for in sweetness and compass of voice she stood unrivalled, no less than in science, judgment, and taste.

At the opening of the parliamentary campaign the following year, Mr. Sheridan took a very active part in all the debates that arose on the subject of the Westminster scrutiny, a proceeding which gave great offence even to many of the friends of government, who saw, in the prolongation of this tedious business, no other design than that of harassing Mr. Fox, and mortifying his party. The scrutiny, however, occasioned as much warm discussion and lengthened argument in the House of Commons as if it had been a question of national importance, though out of doors it was

treated with general reprobation and ridicule. The wit of Sheridan did not lie dormant in this contest, and he had some good opportunities of exercising it, particularly on the ninth of February, when Mr. Michael Angelo Taylor first acquired the appellation of Chicken, by saying that he always delivered his legal opinion in that house and elsewhere with great humility, because he was young, and might, with propriety, call himself a *chicken in the profession of the law*. Soon after this modest declaration, which excited a smile through the house, Bearcroft, who advocated the scrutiny against Fox, adverted to the expression that had been used by Mr. Taylor, and said, for his part, with regard to legal opinions, he should never be biassed by them, whether they came from chickens or old cocks. This was enough for Sheridan, who immediately followed Bearcroft, and in a humorous desultory speech, which produced repeated peals of laughter, he took notice of the diffidence of Mr. Taylor, as connected with another observation of the same gentleman, "that he should then vote with opposition because they were in the right, but that in all probability he should never vote with them again;" thus presaging that for the future they would be always in the wrong. "If such be his augury," observed Sheridan, "I cannot help looking upon this chicken as a bird of ill omen, and wish that he had continued side by side with the full grown

cock (alluding to Bearcroft), who will, no doubt, long continue to feed about the gates of the Treasury, to pick up those crumbs which are there plentifully scattered about, to keep the chickens and full grown fowls together."

The propositions which were brought forward by Mr. Pitt at the beginning of this session, for granting to Ireland a free participation of the commerce of the kingdom, having created general alarm throughout the manufacturing districts, Mr. Sheridan employed himself, during the Easter recess, in visiting Lancashire and other parts, for the purpose of ascertaining the state of trade, and the opinions of the people. This tour did not escape the notice of ministers; and it was said, that wherever he came, particular attention was paid to his conduct, of which a regular report was transmitted to government.

The story obtained some credit afterwards, from a sharp altercation that took place between Mr. (now Lord) Rolle and Sheridan, in the course of a debate on the partial repeal of the duty upon fustians. Mr. Sheridan in his speech condemned the tax altogether; and, at the same time, endeavoured to support his opposition to it by adducing the evidence of his personal observations at Manchester, and other places, where a general spirit of dissatisfaction prevailed against the measures of the government on the subject of the cotton trade.

This called up the member for Devonshire; who observed, in his usual blunt manner, that it was no wonder discontent should have arisen in those districts, when, at the time alluded to, handbills of the most seditious tendency were industriously circulated among the manufacturers. Mr. Sheridan was not, indeed, directly charged with being concerned in these inflammatory advertisements; but he was pretty broadly alluded to by Mr. Rolle, who added, that "could he but bring the proof home to the party suspected as the author, he would take proper steps to have his head placed upon Temple Bar."

This extraordinary declaration could not fail to make a deep impression upon the house; and it evidently produced no small confusion in the ranks of opposition, the leader of whom immediately rose to disavow all knowledge of the publications which had been so actively dispersed. Mr. Fox was followed by his friend Sheridan, who repelled the imputation with uncommon heat, and in the height of passion threw out the severest invectives against the minister and his supporters; while, in immediate reply to the gentleman who had so completely ruffled his temper, he contented himself with insinuating that the prosaic handbills were less offensive to his feelings than a certain production, then generally read, under the title of the "ROLLIAD." But, having mentioned this performance, Mr. Sheridan embraced the op-

portunity of declaring that he had not the smallest share in that satire, any more than he had in the objectionable papers which were distributed in and about Manchester.

Mr. Rolle, in reply, expressed his sovereign contempt of the author of the work just noticed by Sheridan; but, in returning to the subject of the hand-bills, he said, in very plain language, that as the cap seemed to fit the two gentlemen, they were welcome to wear it. He saw that he had touched a sore place: and though he had been told that there was no act in being to prevent the circulation of such bills, there ought to be one: and then repeated his former assertion, that if he knew the author, he would take proper steps to have him punished.

To this menace, Mr. Sheridan condescended to return no other answer than by saying, that while the honourable member talked at random, he should let him pass unnoticed; but that if he really ventured to continue so serious a charge against him, he would, in spite of all consequences, treat him both there and any where else very plainly and very coarsely.

Of the satire alluded to in this ardent conversation, it may be proper to say a few words, because it was very generally believed at the time that the lively genius of Sheridan had a considerable share in the production. The "Criticism on the Rolliad" were a series of papers that appeared in one of the

popular journals, and purported to exhibit extracts from a mock heroic poem bearing that title, but which poem in fact had no real existence. The passages given as quotations from the Rolliad were descriptive sketches of persons connected with the government, or such members of the two houses as were supporters of the minister. These pretended extracts were mere vehicles in low but humorous verse, for the purpose of conveying the most ludicrous representations and severe castigations of public men and public measures. The poetry and the comments, which afforded much amusement at the time, certainly indicated a great variety of comic powers, with a most extensive knowledge of the political world. But these criticisms were, like the production of Martinus Scriblerus, the joint efforts of a club of wits, consisting of General Fitzpatrick, Dr. French Laurence the civilian, Mr. George Ellis, since known by his elegant works on ancient romances and early English poetry, and Mr. Joseph Richardson, author of the comedy of the "Fugitive," and other pieces. While the Rolliad was in the course of entertaining the town, the death of Mr. William Whitehead, the poet laureat, opened a new source of satirical humour to the same facetious society; and accordingly, a succession of odes appeared in a similar channel of publication, as the productions of a set of candidates for the vacant laurel. These burlesque pieces were drawn up as characteristic of several persons in public life, and were written in laughable

imitation of the customary birth-day odes, according to the known opinions and connexions of the persons whose names they bore.

The idea was certainly original, and the execution reflected more credit upon the wit and genius of the authors than upon their delicacy or liberality; for some of the pieces were highly profane, and others grossly indecent. In the composition either of the Rolliad, or the Probationary Odes, Mr. Sheridan had not the smallest concern; but his brother-in-law, Tickell, contributed his assistance to the latter, as he also did to some other squibs of the party which came out at this period.

The propositions for the consolidation and improvement of the Irish commerce, though framed in the spirit of the concessions made to that kingdom during the administration of Lord North, but going far beyond them in the substantial benefit which they were designed to produce, experienced a most determined opposition. Mr. Sheridan, in particular, was uncommonly active in all the debates upon the resolutions, and sometimes he even voted contrary to the sentiments of his own party, yet always with an inflexible hostility to the minister. In this he seems to have consulted the inclinations of the popular zealots in the Irish House of Commons, who rendered these propositions obnoxious to the people at large, under the pretext that they had a covert intention to undermine the national

independence. Thus, by creating a fear of what had no existence, these men sacrificed the very advantages, which, properly improved, would have raised their country to a state of splendour, by exciting a spirit of industry among the inhabitants, and opening to them the same sources of wealth that were so profitably pursued by their neighbours. By the proposed regulations, the linen trade was not only secured to Ireland for ever, against all competition ; but the colonial commerce was laid open, and the Irish manufactures were allowed a free admission into every port of Great Britain, with liberty of being re-exported free of all duties. Such was the disinterested boon held out to that island ; and yet obviously advantageous as it was in all respects to Ireland, the patriots there, as they were called, had the hardihood to persuade their countrymen that the whole was an insult and an injury ; while, on this side of the water, many of our manufacturing towns petitioned against the resolutions, as being pregnant with incalculable mischief, if not absolute ruin to our own trade. Here, certainly, the public apprehensions were not without some plausible foundation, but the very alarm excited among the trading interest in Britain proved the utter unreasonableness of that which was felt by the Irish people. Such, however, is the blindness induced by political frenzy, that men who are under the influence of it frequently mistake evil for good, and treat their real friends as the worst of

enemies. Of this, the Irish nation exhibited a striking instance on the present occasion, when, to gratify a momentary humour, they rejoiced at the rejection in their parliament of the bill, which had received the royal sanction here, for the extension of the benefits of our commercial capital to both kingdoms. The victory obtained by the noisy party, though in reality it was little better than an act of patricide, was celebrated as a triumph gained in the cause of liberty; while in England and Scotland, the trading communities rejoiced at the madness which had relieved them from the dread of a competition in manufactures, and a rivalry in commerce. But the defeat which the measure had met with in Ireland did not quite satisfy the opposition on this side of the Channel, who, at the commencement of the next session in January, 1786, endeavoured to revive the subject in some violent censures on the speech from the throne; and Mr. Sheridan, in particular, intimated it as his opinion that the business was again to be taken up in the sister kingdom, where the propositions had received a peremptory and contumelious rejection. The evident object of this unseasonable intrusion was to render the matter still more odious, and to draw ministers into some dilemma, by compelling them to enter into such an explanation as would create a new alarm. But if this was the design of Mr. Sheridan and his friends, it was frustrated by the

prudence observed on the ministerial side of the house, where the attempt to provoke discussion was treated with becoming silence, while the speaker properly interposed his authority for the restoration of order.

The first business of consequence that came under the consideration of parliament in this session was the plan for erecting fortifications at the dock-yards of Portsmouth and Plymouth. This project originated with the Duke of Richmond, whose attention, as Master-General of the Ordnance, had been led to the situation of our naval arsenals by the events of the late war, when depredations upon our shipping had not only been committed to a lamentable extent, but the combined squadrons of the enemy had actually driven our fleet up the Channel, and thereby rendered a landing easy upon any part of the western coast, the whole of which was vulnerable from the Isle of Wight to the Land's End. To guard against similar dangers in future, his grace formed this scheme, which, being submitted to the House of Commons, was referred to a board of naval and military officers, who, in their report, stated that the plan would require above seven hundred thousand pounds to carry it into execution. But by this time, the measure having attracted general notice, a variety of opinions appeared in print upon it; and it must be allowed that the majority were decidedly hostile to the project. Mr. Pitt, however,

brought forward a motion for carrying it into effect, and adduced in his speech many plausible reasons to urge its utility, and even necessity. On the other hand, the objections were strong, humorous, and popular. The most singular argument of all was that alleged by Mr. Sheridan, who resisted the proceeding upon the ground that it was wholly unconstitutional. He framed a supposition, that an evil time might come, when evil counsellors, having gained an ascendancy over the royal mind, would endeavour to support the misguided sovereign in an attempt upon the rights and liberties of his people, by the employment of a military force, towards which object the intended fortifications must be peculiarly favourable.

This hypothetical assumption was drawn out to a considerable length, and managed with the wonted address, wit, and ingenuity of the orator; though it can hardly be supposed that any one of his hearers thought it deserving of the least serious consideration. That standing armies and multiplied garrisons are reasonable objects of jealousy among a free people cannot be denied; but that fortifying the public dock-yards, which are of so much importance to the national welfare, would ever be instrumental to the establishment of despotism, is a notion too extravagant for belief. It should be observed, however, that Mr. Sheridan did not content himself with resting his opposition upon the representation of problematical evils,

for he had too much good sense to feel alarmed at the phantoms which his fertile imagination had created ; and therefore, after amusing his hearers in this way some time, he reasoned a little more soberly against the plan, upon its insufficiency to answer the intended object, in which he was supported by the authority of several able engineers. At seven in the morning, the house, which was very full, divided upon the question, and the members being equal, the speaker gave his vote on the side of opposition, by which means the motion was lost.

Mr. Sheridan was less successful in his resistance to the famous plan of Mr. Pitt for the reduction of the national debt, by the establishment of a sinking fund. Here also the objections were purely hypothetical, though they were formally branched out into a long string of resolutions, the whole of which had a negative character, and tended to shew that the proposed measure promised much more than could possibly be realized. It might well excite surprise, that a financial subject of the greatest importance, and one that required profound study, should have been consigned by the political body constituting the opposition to the management of the only man in their ranks who was the least qualified to cope with the minister, or to make out a specious case, as the ground for contention. The business, however, was artfully contrived ; for knowing the extreme difficulty of

attacking the principle on which the system was founded, the only thing left to the party was to raise doubts of its practicability, and to find faults in detail. This task was easy enough, because it was one that neither required studious research nor laborious calculation. Such a plan of political tactics might have been excused where the acquisition of a triumph would not have affected the interests of morality, or impeded the ends of public justice; but in the present instance it was highly reprehensible, inasmuch as the success of the operation must have destroyed or retarded a measure that had a direct tendency to promote economy, and to lessen the national burthens. It was admitted, on all hands, that the liquidation of the public debt was a most desirable object; and yet, when the only efficient mode of doing this was brought forward upon the application of a demonstrative principle, the party endeavoured to deprive the minister of the merit of carrying the business, and the nation of enjoying the benefit. Fortunately, however, for posterity, the sixteen resolutions brought up by Mr. Sheridan, to impede the progress of this measure, and to cripple it in its infancy, were negatived without a division, and they stand upon record only as memorials of the rashness of wit and the violence of prejudice.

In enlivening a debate upon the dullest and most tedious subjects, no man ever excelled, and

few perhaps have equalled, Sheridan, who appeared to be always on the alert to gain over his hearers by the exercise of good humour, and the display of a happy imagination. Of this he gave a striking instance in prefacing a motion, brought in by himself, for the printing of tax bills, the necessity of which he advocated with his usual felicity of illustration, though he proved unsuccessful in the division. The bill on which he grounded his motion was one then under consideration for imposing a tax on perfumery goods; and in moving that it should be printed, he observed, "That the practice of printing bills was of late date, not above ten or twelve years. Some persons had pretended to argue against the printing of tax bills, on the same principle that had induced the house, on all occasions, to resist the suffering evidence or counsel to be heard against them; the reason for which regulation was, that the house might not be embarrassed by the applications of those, who, from motives of private interest, would oppose every measure brought in for the public good. But this rule, he thought, was carried too far; and as tax bills had multiplied greatly of late, it was necessary that they should be generally understood, which, by the present practice, they could not well be till they became a law, and then by their confusion they often puzzled the wise heads of justices of the peace. The blunders which had ensued from the multi-

plication of these laws had been attended, he said, with much inconvenience to the people; and produced continually new business in every succeeding session of parliament, to correct the errors that had been committed in former ones." Here Mr. Sheridan proceeded to draw the humorous outline of a bill to remedy the defects of some already in being, and which he proposed to do upon the plan of a simple but very ingenious moral tale that had often afforded him amusement in his early days, under the title of "This is the House that Jack built." First, then, comes in a bill imposing a tax;—then comes in a bill to amend that bill for imposing a tax;—and then comes a bill to explain the bill that amended the bill;—next, a bill to remedy the defects of the bill, for explaining the bill that amended the bill; and so on *ad infinitum*. After parodying the story in this way to a still greater length, Mr. Sheridan entered upon a comparison of tax bills to a ship built in the dock-yard, which was found to be defective every voyage, and consequently was obliged to undergo a new repair: first, it was to be caulked, then to be new planked, then to be new ribbed, again to be careened, and after all these expensive alterations, the vessel was generally obliged to be broken up and rebuilt.

When the laugh occasioned by this statement had subsided, the orator pointed out several absurdities in the tax bills, which had been recently

passed, and which, he contended, might have been avoided, if the bills, by being printed, had undergone a full and public discussion. In the horse tax bill, for instance, there was a clause which required a stamp to be placed, not, indeed, on the animal, but on some part of the accoutrements. This clause, however, on a little consideration, had been abandoned; but another was inserted, so absurd, that it never was carried into execution: namely, the one by which it was enacted that the numbers and names of all the horses in each parish should be affixed on the church door. The churchwardens were also required, by the same act, to return lists of the windows within their districts to the commissioners of stamps, for the purpose of detecting those who had not entered their horses. "Now," said the speaker, "if horses were in the habit of looking out at windows, this might possibly have been a wise and judicious regulation; but under the present circumstances there was some little occasion for wonder how such ideas came to be associated in the minds of those who framed the bill, unless it was that they wished to sink the business of legislation into contempt, even with those who were appointed to carry the laws into execution." Mr. Sheridan then went on, in the same desultory manner, to observe, that a happy encouragement was given in the act, which enjoined the staving of all spirits that should be seized. Now, as con-

sumers must be again supplied, the smugglers were emboldened hereby to proceed in their business with redoubled activity; and no doubt they drank, in grateful libations, the health of the minister, who framed the bill, with three times three.

“In fact,” continued the facetious speaker, “every bill of the present administration had gone through as many transformations as the insect in its progress to become a butterfly; and every one of them afforded a substantial argument for the necessity of his motion.” He next condemned, in the same strain, the proposed tax on perfumery; and enumerating the articles of lavender, milk of roses, &c. said “that the commissioners, in distinguishing the various particulars of taxation, under this denomination, must be gifted by nature with the noses of pointers.” Mr. Sheridan then concluded an extremely erratic, but at the same time a most entertaining speech, with applying these lines, from Pope’s Rape of the Lock, to the House of Commons:

“Our humble province is to tend the fair,
Not a less pleasing, though less glorious care:
To save the powder from too rude a gale,
Nor let the imprison’d essences exhale.”

Great part of this session was employed in discussing the charges brought against Mr. Hastings, for high crimes and misdemeanours, alleged to have been committed by him, or with his con-

nivance, during the long period of his residence in India as Governor-General. In all these debates Mr. Sheridan had an active share, and was very frequently engaged in sharp conflict with Major Scott, the old friend and avowed agent of Mr. Hastings. On many of these occasions the advantage, in point of information and sound argument, was decidedly in favour of Mr. Scott, whose long residence in the East enabled him fully to contend with one who necessarily drew all his intelligence from the reports of others, and who, besides, was not very remarkable for his diligence in prosecuting intricate inquiries, or careful in the selection of his authorities. Errors under such circumstances could not possibly be avoided, even by men who had studied the affairs of India with the greatest application at a remote distance from that country : but it was reasonable to have expected, from the comparatively scanty knowledge which such persons could acquire on the nature of oriental customs and connexions, that they would have conducted themselves with deliberate caution and moderation in the discussion of subjects upon which it was possible for them to be wholly mistaken. But the eagerness with which the assailants of Mr. Hastings entered into the prosecution, the high tone of confidence assumed by them in the incipency of the proceedings, and the offensive language constantly adopted whenever his name was brought forward in connexion with the affairs of India,

manifested a spirit too strongly tinged with the virulence of party to be consistent with the great ends of public justice. An instance of this political abuse appeared in a speech of Mr. Sheridan at the close of the session, upon a motion made for a call of the house, and which was resisted by him as totally unnecessary. On this occasion, he observed, "that he had made every possible inquiry to learn whether any extraordinary news had recently arrived from India, and he could hear of nothing extraordinary but of the receipt of an extraordinary large diamond, said to have been sent to Mr. Hastings, and presented to His Majesty at an extraordinary and critical period of time."

The obvious intention of this digression was palpably to convey an idea that Mr. Hastings, or his friends in the east, had made this present to secure his interest. But, in relating the story of the diamond, Mr. Sheridan probably was not aware, that while he was endeavouring to increase the public prejudice against Mr. Hastings, he was virtually impeaching the integrity of his sovereign; for if the present, at such a period, originated in corrupt motives, or was liable to the suspicion of being designed to serve an evil purpose, the acceptance was infinitely more criminal than the actual offering. The circumstance, however, which was so improperly introduced, and inaccurately stated, to answer a party purpose, had not the remotest relation to the business of Mr. Hast-

ings, though, by the artful mention of it in this way, it flew abroad, and created a strong prejudice against him in the public mind. It was generally reported that the present, which consisted of a bulse, or package of diamonds, had been sent as the gift of Madajee Scindiah, the Mahratta chief, to Mr. Hastings, who, to screen himself from the accusation of receiving so enormous a bribe, delivered it to His Majesty. Such was the equity of those who were at this time, according to their own account, engaged in a great public inquiry, solely upon patriotic principles, and to serve the interests of justice and humanity. Now the real history of this present proved the reverse of what was stated, and it was inexcusable to give a false representation of it, when the truth might have been had without trouble or delay.

The Nizam of the Deccan, on being apprized of the departure of Mr. Hastings from India, sent a bulse of diamonds sealed up to Bengal, for the purpose of his presenting them to the King on his arrival in England. But Mr. Hastings, having sailed before the diamonds reached Calcutta, they were entrusted to the care of Captain Church of the army, who was about to take his passage home in the *Hinchinbrooke*. In the mean time, the fame of these jewels, and of their immense value, had gone abroad; and when the *Hinchinbrooke* was sunk in Bengal River, a Lascar took advantage of the confusion to break open the trunks of Captain Church, and thereby got possession of the bulse.

It was, however, rescued from his hands, and returned to Mr. Crofts, the agent of Mr. Johnson, who was then the resident at the Court of the Nizam. Mr. Crofts sent the diamonds to England, addressed to the care of Mr. Blair, brother-in-law to Mr. Johnson, and he handed them to Mr. Hastings, who entrusted them to Major Scott, by whom they were delivered to Lord Sydney, who presented them to the King.

While the proceedings against Mr. Hastings were going on in the House of Commons, a bill was brought in by Mr. Dundas, for improving the government of India. The means proposed consisted chiefly in an enlargement of the powers of the Governor-General, by releasing him from all dependence upon the council; and thus getting rid of those cabals and divisions, which, on so many occasions, had proved detrimental to the British interests in the east, and injurious to the concerns of the company. The bill, however, was violently opposed by Mr. Burke, who represented it as a direct creation of despotism, while Mr. Sheridan condemned it, as tending to facilitate the ruin of the company, who were verging, he said, rapidly into a state of bankruptcy. Fortunately for the interests of truth, but to the discredit of political augury, these fears and predictions failed; and the world, instead of beholding the eclipse of our power in the east, has witnessed the extension of its splendour.

CHAPTER XI.

Origin of the Hostility to Mr. Hastings.—Political Morality.—Agency of Sheridan.—Violent Character of Mr. Burke.—Temporary Dispute, and Reconciliation.—Insincerity of the Party.—Commencement of the Impeachment.—Strange Conduct of Mr. Pitt.—Part allotted to Sheridan.—His famous Speech on the fourth Charge.—Extravagant Panegyric.

THE prosecution of Mr. Hastings bore a very near resemblance, in regard to the industrious malignity with which it was carried on, to that of the great Earl of Strafford, in the reign of Charles the First. Both impeachments originated in the cabals and resentment of party, and both were pursued with that rancour, or thirst of vengeance, which is ever the characteristic of proceedings that have no better principle than the ends of party for their object. The Earl of Strafford fell by an act of attainder, because he abandoned the ranks of a faction that was bent upon the subjugation of the throne; and Mr. Hastings was worried through a frightful trial of above seven years continuance, for standing in the way of a set of men whose headlong ambition led them to aim at the absolute establishment of their power at home, by

getting into their hands the whole of the eastern patronage, thereby annihilating the rights of the company, and reducing the crown itself to a cipher.

In the heat of the American war, these same men advocated the cause of Mr. Hastings against Lord North, who wanted to remove him from the government of Bengal; but that minister could not succeed in his object, and he afterwards gladly assented to the re-appointment of the very person whose dismissal he had endeavoured to procure, on charges which were unsubstantiated. At length, when the party, of which the Marquis of Rockingham was at the head, drove Lord North from the helm, it was deemed expedient to effect a change in the Indian government, for the purpose of gratifying some friends who were unprovided for; and then the charges which the same party had ridiculed were revived as a ground for the recall of Mr. Hastings. But the resistance made by the proprietors, and the death of Lord Rockingham, put an end to this design, and the projectors of it were again obliged to take their seats on the opposition side of the house. Then came about the notorious coalition, which was the political manœuvre of Mr. Burke, who thought that an engine of such combined power must be irresistible; and so it proved in the attack made by this formidable junction upon the administration of Lord Shelburne. But the triumph of the

coalition diffused no joy over the nation ; and the use which that party made of their victory soon excited a general spirit of dissatisfaction at their conduct. By a strange fatuity, they appeared to despise public opinion, and to look with stern contempt upon any expression of resistance to their measures. Secure in their numbers, and confident in their wisdom, they were resolved to carry without delay, and even in opposition to the general voice of the nation, the scheme of placing the entire management of British India in the hands of the House of Commons. Here Mr. Burke and his colleagues expected a tacit submission, at least, on the part of Mr. Hastings and his friends : but they were mistaken ; for neither by cajoling nor menace could those persons be induced to sanction a measure which they were persuaded was unjust in itself, and must prove ruinous in the operation. The India Bill, brought forward by Mr. Fox, and in the composition of which Mr. Sheridan had some concern under the direction of Burke, having created a great alarm, the party began to be under some apprehensions, and were desirous of obtaining something like a countenance for the plan from those who were supposed to be best acquainted with our affairs in the east.

On this occasion, Mr. Sheridan was appointed to negotiate with those persons who stood the highest in the esteem of Mr. Hastings, and who

were known to possess his entire confidence. But every one of these friends gave a decided opinion against the bold and hazardous plans upon which ministers were so eagerly bent for revolutionizing the government of India; and Major Scott, with whom, as the accredited agent of Mr. Hastings, he was extremely anxious to hold a conference, declined an interview altogether.

Had Mr. Hastings given the least encouragement to the views which were then formed by the coalition, or, had even his acquaintance in Europe, who were most conversant on the subject of Indian policy and interest, suffered the bill of Mr. Fox to go on without any attempt to open the eyes of the people of England to the iniquity of the measure, the world would never have heard of the impeachment. But when that bill was thrown out by the Lords, and its authors were compelled to give up their places by the royal mandate, disappointed ambition degenerated into the meanness of resentment, and they who had courted an alliance with Mr. Hastings, were now disposed to hunt him down as an enemy to the human race. Mr. Burke took the lead in this hostility, which he conducted with a zeal that would have done him honour, had it been tempered with moderation, and directed with liberality. But it was the misfortune of this celebrated man to be the slave of his passions; and though no one had a more acute genius and penetrating judg-

ment, he too often suffered his mind to be influenced by violent prejudices, which inflamed his imagination to such a degree, that any story was received, when it could be made subservient to the object on which he had engaged. He was no more scrupulous with regard to his authorities than in the choice of his language; and of this, numerous instances appeared in the course of the prosecution, which began at his instigation, and was carried on under his direction. The irascibility manifested by Mr. Burke, in every stage of the business, was not merely undignified, but it was a clear indication that, whatever might be the pretence, there was more of private feeling than public spirit in the motives to this impeachment. The party with whom he was connected had, indeed, an idea that the world would see the affair in this light; and it is a fact, that the doubt which was stated upon the subject, when Mr. Burke first brought it forward at one of their meetings, was very near being productive of a schism. Naturally sanguine when he had any particular object in view, he was impatient of all contradiction; and having, by his correspondence with India, obtained information, which he considered as sufficient ground for very serious charges against the Governor-General, he laid the same before his friends soon after the failure of their bill, and the consequent loss of their places. But neither the communications nor the arguments of Mr. Burke

gave satisfaction to Mr. Fox, who, when the whole correspondence had been examined, delivered it as his opinion, that it would be ridiculous to bring the matter up in the nature of an accusation against an individual, especially such a respectable character as the Governor-General of India; and that, at the most, the business would only afford talk for a fortnight. On hearing this, Burke flew into a violent passion, charged his associates with want of good faith, and threatened to separate from them for ever; with which declaration he took up his papers and departed. This conduct threw the party into great confusion; and being aware how necessary it was to preserve the appearance of unity among themselves, some of the members proposed that a concession should be made to Burke, with a promise of supporting him with their united strength in the concern which he had so much at heart. This negotiation was entrusted to Sheridan, who had the address to bring Burke back again to the club; and the business was then proceeded in with as much vigour as if all the parties had been equally sincere, and convinced by indubitable evidence of the truth of the charges they engaged themselves to support. But at this very time there was hardly a man among them, with the exception of Burke, who had any acquaintance with the subject; and though it might have been supposed that Lord North, from former prejudices, would have en-

tered with most ardour into an inquiry leading to a prosecution of Mr. Hastings, he acted otherwise, and was, in fact, almost neutral.

Even Sheridan would have gladly avoided so arduous an undertaking, which some of the more moderate of the party considered as a desperate measure, and one that was likely to involve them in difficulties, out of which it would require more than ordinary ingenuity to escape. An increase of evidence, indeed, was procured from persons who had been associated with Mr. Hastings in the council, but having become his deadly enemies, were very ready to assist the views of the party in this business. But it did not require any great skill to discover that testimony of this character could hardly receive much credit among dispassionate men, who were animated by the feelings of justice. Mr. Burke, however, continued his exertions, and sought for matter of accusation in all directions, with an eagerness which shewed that personal enmity was at the root of his motives. On his side, indeed, it was an individual hatred, occasioned by the degradation and expulsion of one of his friends, who was sent out to India with his recommendation, but whose conduct afterwards proved how unworthily that patronage had been bestowed. From this goodly source issued the principal part of the great mass of forgery and misrepresentation, which, in this country, was moulded and worked up into a monstrous heap of charges, to overwhelm

with ruin and infamy a man who was almost adored by the very people, towards whom, if any credit could be put in the reports of his adversaries, he had acted the part of an inhuman and avaricious tyrant.

Yet, with the usual inconsistency and duplicity of party spirit, Mr. Burke and his auxiliaries in this business repeatedly disavowed all private enmity and political views in the line which they were pursuing, though their language, and the manner in which the accusation was conducted by them, completely refuted their pretensions. It would perhaps be harsh to say, that Burke himself did not believe the criminality which he prosecuted; but as the grounds for his faith were of the very worst description, the dubiousness of the evidence rendered his obstinacy and scurrility the more inexcusable. He that takes up an excessive prejudice against another, upon loose reports, or complicated and very distant transactions, conveyed to him by interested individuals, may flatter himself into an opinion that he acts upon public principles, when in truth he is poisoning the course of justice at the fountain, by giving currency to calumny, and aiding the purposes of revenge.

As little apology can be offered in behalf of those who enlisted themselves under the standard of Mr. Burke upon this occasion; for whatever pretence they might set up to patriotism, it is certain that they had no persuasion in their own

minds of the turpitude of Mr. Hastings, with whom, on his arrival in England, they would have entered into a treaty, on the condition of his co-operating in their views. When these trials of his integrity failed, the party joined more heartily with Burke, who was not a little nettled at receiving a demand on the part of Mr. Hastings to bring forward the charges upon which he had so often dilated in the language of rhetorical declamation, while the object of his invective was in a remote region, where he had not an opportunity of repelling the slanders continually poured upon his character, or of entering at all upon his defence.

The answer given to this call by Mr. Burke afforded a very curious instance of his candour, for he contented himself with telling a story about the Duke of Parma, who, when challenged by Henry the Fourth of France to bring out his forces against him in the field, replied, "that he very well knew what he had to do, and was not come so far as to be directed by an enemy."

This might have been considered as a good joke in a matter of trifling moment, or of ordinary litigation; but it was a cruel piece of levity, to say the least of it, when applied to a man who was naturally anxious to free himself from those foul reproaches which had been heaped upon him, session after session, with all the copiousness of invention, and the utmost power of impassioned eloquence.

Thus that justice, which, in the most common concerns of life, and in the humblest walks of society, every person is entitled to who feels a laudable solicitude for the vindication of his character, was denied to Mr. Hastings by his accuser, with the sarcastic stroke, that it was not yet a convenient season.

At length, after various motions for papers, and successive debates upon them, in most or all of which Mr. Sheridan had a leading part, the charges, to the amount of twenty-two, were brought up, and formally exhibited at the bar of the house. This was at the beginning of April, in 1786, and Mr. Hastings, on the first of the following month, began in the same place to read his defence, which lasted three days. On the first of June, Mr. Burke brought forward the primary charge, on the injustice, cruelty, and treachery, of the war against the inhabitants of the Rohillas. This charge was lost in the committee, which gave the friends of Mr. Hastings good reason to suppose that the rest would have experienced the same fate; but in this they were mistaken, for to the surprise of all parties, Mr. Pitt, though he censured the line of conduct pursued by Mr. Fox, in moving an impeachment for cruelty towards Cheit Sing, the Rajah of Benares, voted in favour of the motion. This was the more unaccountable, because the minister confessed that the original proceedings against Cheit Sing were justifiable, and that, as at

the time when the alleged tyranny happened the Governor-General had received intelligence of the war with France, his policy in this instance, for the preservation of our Indian possessions, admitted of a full defence. What could induce Mr. Pitt, with these impressions on his mind, to give the weight of his influence on the side of a vexatious prosecution, is the more difficult to guess, because he had, according to his own statement, but a very imperfect acquaintance with these questions, which required an intimate knowledge of Indian principles and habits. It is unfortunate that this great man did not, throughout the whole of the business, adhere to his original intention of preserving an absolute neutrality, in which case, there can be little doubt but that all the charges would have fallen to the ground. Mr. Pitt has been vindicated on the plea of conscientious principle, and a regard to his duty as a legislator. But his own confession of the little insight which he had into the internal state of India, and the peculiar policy necessary to be observed amidst such a variety of conflicting interests, should have made him cautious in voting as he did upon an article which he had penetration enough to see had been grossly perverted in the manner in which it was stated.

An impeachment being thus voted on one charge, sufficient ground of confidence was gained by the party for carrying several others; because,

having in this instance obtained the sanction of government on a point of very dubious character, there could be no room to suppose that the same sanction would be withheld on questions that were of a more specious description, and which were capable, in proper hands, of producing a very impressive effect, both in the House of Commons, and upon the public at large.

Nothing could exceed the skill with which this political drama was contrived, in the construction of the charges, and the distribution of the parts which the several performers were to play; and it must be allowed that the opening of the piece exhibited a rare display of talents, admirably fitted to captivate the feelings of an audience. The depth of this policy appeared most conspicuous in the selection of Sheridan to conduct that part of the accusation which required, more than any other, the creative power of the imagination, and the impressive energy of pathetic eloquence.

The charge against Mr. Hastings on the subject of the Rajah of Benares was intimately connected with that relative to the resumption of the Jaghires, or the lands assigned to the Begums of Oude for their dower, and the confiscation of the treasures of these princesses; yet were these charges so separated and worked up, as to have the character of two very distinct transactions. On the former charge, the committee of the House of Commons had already decided for an impeachment, under an

idea that Cheit Sing was a sovereign prince, who, having been treated with as such by the English government in the east, was entitled to respect and protection. Now the fact was, and the party who carried on the prosecution could not be ignorant of it, this same chief owed his situation entirely to the India Company, under whom he held it by the feudal tenure of suit and service. But instead of discharging the obligations by which he was bound, the Rajah committed the vilest outrages within his district; and when he was called upon for his contingency, in common with the other dependencies of the same description, he broke out in open rebellion. In that rebellion, Cheit Sing received encouragement and assistance from the Begums of Oude, who raised men for his service, and paid them beforehand, with an engagement that they should spare none of the English or their connexions. Such was the situation of things at the gloomy period of 1781, when Mr. Hastings left Calcutta to reduce an insurrection, which threatened the total destruction of the British interest in that quarter. By the promptitude of his exertions, and the fidelity of the Nabob of Oude, the rebellion was suppressed; but as the spirit which had kindled it remained, the only alternative that could be adopted to prevent the recurrence of the evil at a future period, when it might not be so easy to make an effectual resistance, was that of strengthening the power of the nabob, by taking

away the means of mischief from the hands of his female relatives. These measures, however severe they might seem to those who could be no judges of the necessity of them, were so absolutely requisite at this critical period, when the safety of British India hung upon a thread, that any governor-general who should have neglected to enforce them would have richly deserved capital punishment for the dereliction of his duty. Yet for his firmness in deposing an unruly chief, who had violated all his engagements by open rebellion, and his policy in supporting a prince who had acted faithfully in opposition to the turbulent disposition of his own family, was Mr. Hastings treacherously misrepresented by the very persons of his own council, whose co-operation he had experienced in these transactions. While in the east, he was regarded as having, by his wisdom and prudence, laid the foundation of the only system that could ensure the security of public peace and private property, he was vilified at home as a cruel oppressor, and a rapacious spoliator. As the circumstances which have been just related constituted the basis of all the calumnies that were circulated with so much industry in England, to the prejudice of Mr. Hastings; and as the whole impeachment turned upon them, it was expedient to give in this place a compressed but plain statement of these events. The strong colour which Mr. Fox threw over the story of the Rajah of Benares, by sup-

pressing material facts, and elevating the character of that personage in contradiction to truth, was productive of very pernicious consequences; one of the worst of which was the preparation of the public mind to receive any evil report that could be brought forward to the disadvantage of a man who had saved by his energy the possessions of the English in the east, after the loss of their colonies in the west.

The success of the motion made by Mr. Fox at the end of one session afforded great facility to Mr. Sheridan, who was nominated to bring forward, in the next, the charge relative to the case of the Begums of Oude. He had now time and encouragement to work up his materials to the best advantage; and as his subject could only be productive of effect by being amplified, the combined talents of the affiliated accusers were employed in organizing those parts which appeared best calculated to operate powerfully upon the passions, and in so enriching the whole, by inventive description and vigorous language, as to take the feelings of the hearers by surprise, and to render the exercise of the judgment unavailing. The simple unvarnished story of the princesses of Oude would have defeated the very purposes which the managers of this business had in view; and, therefore, all that art could perform and fancy supply was called in, without any moral reluctance, in order to keep the public mind continually vibrating between pity and indignation.

While this machinery was in preparation, the party had recourse to various methods of rousing general attention to the subject. The tragedy of Oude was indeed the object of universal expectation ; and thus, a bias being created against a person of high character, before the matter of accusation could be fairly heard or distinctly understood, it required no great penetration to predict the result. Under such circumstances, it was perfectly natural in Mr. Hastings to call upon the public for a candid hearing, and to remonstrate with the feeling of wounded integrity against the advantage which the conductors of the prosecution were taking of their united power and abilities. Yet, even this justifiable act of self-defence was ungenerously treated as an aggravation of crime ; and Mr. Hastings was vilified for endeavouring to remove that prejudice which his adversaries had industriously excited, not only by their speeches in parliament, but through the medium of the daily prints. Now, if there was any thing wrong in this latter course, the censure due to it could apply in strict justice only to the prosecutors, who, if they really had nothing but truth for their object, would have avoided every appearance of anticipated victory. On the one hand stood an individual, almost insulated and defenceless, who, from his long residence in a distant clime, was unacquainted with the numerous artifices necessary to influence public opinion, and to counteract the machinations of

party. In fearful odds were arrayed against him a combination of transcendent talents, and the junction of potent interests; a formidable association, consisting of men who had either filled high offices of state, or who were aiming, by this prosecution, to establish themselves in power.

Considering, therefore, the inequality of this contest, it was but reasonable to have expected that it would have been divested of all acrimony, and every thing that had a tendency to wound the feelings of the accused, and to inflame the passions of the multitude. But the reverse of this liberality appeared in every stage of the proceedings, from which it was evident that the party had not so much a wish to see the innocence of Mr. Hastings established, as to torture the most meritorious actions into proofs of his guilt.

Of this, the celebrated speech delivered by Mr. Sheridan on the seventh of February, 1787, is a striking instance, notwithstanding the exuberance of praise which was bestowed upon it at the time by those who witnessed its astonishing effects. It cannot be doubted that this was a wonderful display of eloquence, but, unfortunately, we are left to guess at the brilliancies which charmed, and the pathetic touches which affected the hearers, because these beauties evaporated in the report, where the reader seeks in vain for that overcoming power of persuasion which is said to have completely fascinated the auditors.

The speech commenced with a bold assumption of the guilt of Mr. Hastings, and with claiming full credence for the evidence that should be brought forward to substantiate the proof of his criminality. Having taken this elevated ground, the speaker descended from it to notice the attempts that had been made on the part of the accused to clear his character from the foul aspersions cast upon it; but here Mr. Sheridan forgot that the exertions of which he complained were necessitated by the conduct of his own friends, whose industry in vilifying Mr. Hastings, preparatory to the opening of the present charge, was certainly calculated to prejudge the question. The orator next ran into a very discursive train of declamation upon the degradation of the British name in the east, the whole of which he attributed, without any qualification, to what he called the malversation and crimes of the principal servant of the company. After advancing this sweeping position, which, if it amounted to any thing, was more dishonourable to the nation than to Mr. Hastings, his accuser proceeded to an extended but needless vindication of the inquiry in which parliament was then engaged; but this he did merely to introduce an apostrophe on the oppressions of suffering millions, and the duty of inflicting an exemplary punishment upon the daring delinquent who had been guilty of the most flagrant acts of enormous tyranny and rapacious pecu-

lation. This call upon the legislature for justice upon the accused was naturally strengthened by an allusion to the former vote, on the subject of the Rajah of Benares, on which occasion Mr. Sheridan gladly availed himself of the opportunity of paying a very flattering compliment to Mr. Pitt, who had divided in favour of the motion for an impeachment on that charge. But with infinite address, this conduct of the minister, while it elicited commendation from Mr. Sheridan, was made use of for the double purpose of creating a strong sentiment in favour of the present motion, and of furnishing an apology for Mr. Burke, whose character, it was said, had been attacked by the slanderous tongue of ignorance and perversion. "But," continued he, "the House of Commons, by their vote on the case of Benares, had declared that the man who brought the charges was no false accuser; that he was not moved by envy, by malice, nor by any unworthy motives, to blacken a spotless name; but that he was the indefatigable, persevering, and, at length, successful champion of oppressed multitudes, against their tyrannical oppressor."

Now, so far as an advocate might be permitted to go in vindication of another, this was very proper language; but as Mr. Sheridan was in the present instance an accuser himself, the eulogy upon his associate was gratuitous; and when considered in its bearing upon the matter in charge,

it was highly indecorous. It shewed, indeed, very plainly, that the conduct of Burke in this vindictive proceeding did not stand clear of suspicion; and the strained effort made by his colleague to shield him, by a vote of the House of Commons, upon a question, the truth of which was yet undecided, however creditable it might be to the ingenuity of the orator, was no justification of his friend.

But let the vindication of Mr. Burke have been ever so satisfactory in itself, and honourable to the feelings of Sheridan, the repeated abuse of Mr. Hastings in almost every sentence of the speech can admit of no excuse. Even the zeal of those who advocated his cause, and persevered in asserting not merely his innocence, but his merits, was sneered at as the effect of simple credulity, the warmth of friendship, and an unsuspecting disposition. Yet these persons did not form their judgment from reports, nor take up an opinion without personal inquiry. They were for the most part eye-witnesses of the conduct which they admired, and of the virtues which they esteemed. It was, therefore, very unbecoming levity, if not wanton cruelty, to treat with contemptuous ridicule the testimony of such men as unworthy of credit, while an implicit confidence was claimed on the part of the accusers, who had nothing but partial evidence, garbled documents, and hearsay stories, for their foundation. Such

management as this was only suited to the boisterous times, when impeachments were frequent, and when the hungry rage of republican fury sought for criminality in loyalty, and distorted the most exalted virtues into matters of charge against the best of men ;—when friendship was made the pretext for the sequestration of property, and when even the expression of pity was construed into an indication of treason against the commonwealth.

The abrupt and confused manner in which the most important part of Mr. Sheridan's speech is reported, has deprived us of the power of forming any thing like a correct judgment of the force of his arguments, or of the faithfulness of his statements. It is evident, however, from his own declaration, that he was principally indebted to the written defence of Mr. Hastings for what he advanced in support of the accusation against him in the treatment of the princesses of Oude. This was a very cheap mode of attack, because, in proportion to the extent of the defence, and the variety of its contents, the more open it lay to critical examination and injurious misrepresentation. Mr. Sheridan, at the outset of his speech on the charge, ventured to anticipate complete success, by declaring that he should support all his serious positions by the authority of the person accused ; and, certainly, if his construction of the narrative brought forward by Mr. Hastings had been the

true one, the conviction of that gentleman was unavoidable. But where is the historical memoir of distant and complicated transactions, in which the penetrating eye of criticism, influenced by political prejudice, or guided by the motive of interest, cannot discover matter upon which to form a charge of error or delinquency? Those measures, which to the local observer appeared to be rendered absolutely necessary for the public welfare, may to another, who had not the opportunity of witnessing the state of the country, or the disposition of the inhabitants, seem capricious and tyrannical. It was a matter of fact, that Mr. Hastings, with the concurrence of the council, of whom his principal enemy, the present Sir Philip Francis, was one, did depose the Rajah of Benares for his rebellion, and establish the security of the province of Oude, by reducing the power of the princesses, who had made an evil use of it, not only with a view to the ruin of the English government in India, but of their own relative, the Nabob.

Opposite conclusions may be drawn for particular purposes from the same circumstance, and with equal facility; but no man has a right to represent that transaction as originating in wickedness, which may be justified by another on the ground of moral principle and political necessity. This was the exact case in the present instance: and whatever variance of opinion there might be

as to the extent of the danger with which the British government in the east was surrounded, at the critical period when these events occurred, nothing short of wilful scepticism could venture to call in question the reality of the danger itself. But as the perilous state of our oriental possessions constituted an ample apology for all the measures pursued by Mr. Hastings, the directors of his prosecution artfully kept it out of sight, and whenever the danger was stated, they contrived, with equal cunning, to make the whole appear as the effect of his evil administration.

Such a course of proceeding may perhaps be admissible on the principles of modern policy, but it surely can never stand the test of moral investigation.

Mr. Sheridan, throughout his laboured and lengthened effort to fix criminality upon the motives of Mr. Hastings, in his visit to Chunar, the residence of the Nabob of Oude, constructed the whole of his arguments upon the system which is calculated to make the worst appear the better reason; or, in the words of the first of all authorities, to “put darkness for light, and light for darkness.” According to the statement contained in this speech, the journey of the Governor-General, and that of the Chief-Justice Sir Elijah Impey, had no other object than oppressive cruelty and rapacious avarice. How far ingenuity can pervert even a commendable action

into premeditated guilt, was most strikingly exhibited in the preposterous turn given to the circumstance of the payment of one hundred thousand pounds by the Nabob to the East India Company, but which was represented by the mover of the charge as an actual bribe given to Mr. Hastings himself; though, in the same speech, it was admitted that this sum had been duly placed to the public account, and proper notice given of it to the directors.

But the greatest stress was laid upon the supposed infamy of making the Nabob of Oude the instrument of injustice, in depriving his mother and other relatives of their possessions. Such a representation afforded ample scope for an appeal to the passions; and here the potent skill of Sheridan's genius was displayed with truly magical effect upon the sympathies of his numerous hearers. Orators, like poets, frequently succeed best in fiction; and so it proved when the sufferings of the Begums of Oude were delineated in the most glowing colours by the prolific fancy of one who could supply the poverty of fact by the richness of description.

An indescribable emotion was perceived to agitate the feelings of the audience: and as few in the assembly were intimately acquainted with the real circumstances of the transactions in question, or could muster philosophy enough to keep their minds under the command of reason, while they

were moved by the talismanic influence of the most powerful elocution, it ought not to excite surprise, that, after being thus borne along from a calm and dispassionate view of the question for five hours and forty minutes, they should be left, as it were, in a state of delirious sensibility. When Mr. Sheridan ended, an unusual mode of expressing admiration followed in loud and repeated plaudits ; which being subsided, a motion was made for an adjournment, that the members might have time to collect their scattered senses, for the exercise of a sober judgment. This proposition was carried, though not without some opposition ; and on the renewal of the debate the following day, the question for an impeachment was decided in the affirmative by a considerable majority, the Chancellor of the Exchequer being one of the number.

In the House of Commons the most flattering testimonies of praise were bestowed upon this celebrated speech. Mr. Burke declared it to be “ the most astonishing effort of eloquence, argument, and wit united, of which there was any record or tradition.” Mr. Fox was not behind-hand with the leader of the impeachment in the measure of his panegyric ; for he said, “ All that he had ever heard, all that he had ever read, when compared with it, dwindled into nothing, and vanished like vapour before the sun.” Even Mr. Pitt is reported to have acknowledged “ that it surpassed all the

eloquence of ancient or modern times, and possessed every thing that genius or art could furnish to agitate and controul the human mind.”

There is something indefinable in these encomiums, the extravagance of which begets a suspicion that they were only the complimentary effusions of the moment: for whatever might be the effect produced in the delivery, the oration, as a composition, judging of it by what appears through the medium of the published report, had none of the qualifications to give it a rank among classical performances. Yet Dr. Parr has not scrupled to go even beyond the strain of hyperbolical panegyric adopted by the other friends of Sheridan, and to represent him as uniting all the excellencies of a perfect orator. Having observed that in him were combined the golden eloquence of Burke, the unstudied elegance and suavity of North, and the forcible variety of Fox, this reverend critic proceeds to eulogise the celebrated speech of Sheridan in language which is as far from being characteristic of the piece it commends, as it is from being candid towards many persons of the first respectability, who happened to differ from the political creed of the doctor and his friends. But in the diatribe on Bellendenus, fulsome praise and illiberal invective are so profusely mingled, as to render both of equal value in the estimation of impartial persons, of which the following is an abundant proof.

“ In the late public cause instituted against a certain Governor, how extensive were his claims to favour and to fame ! With what energy of voice and spirit did he arrest the attention of his hearers, of all ranks, ages, and parties ! In what an inexpressible manner did he communicate delight, and bend the most unwilling minds to conviction !

“ To the discussion of this cause he came most admirably prepared, and all was anxious expectation and attention. From the very beginning he appeared to justify this impatience. That subject, so various, complicated, and abstruse, he comprehended with precision, and explained with systematic acuteness. He placed every argument in that particular point where it would have the greatest energy and effect. Throughout a remarkably long discourse, he was careful to avoid every imprudent expression, while he was manifestly and uniformly consistent with himself. His style was indeed dexterously adapted to the emergency of the occasion : in one part he was copious and brilliant ; in another, more concise and pointed, giving additional polish to truth. As he found it necessary, he instructed, delighted, or agitated his hearers. He appeared to have no other object in view but that of giving the fairest termination to the business ; to prove the guilt of the accused by the most indisputable evidence, and to confirm that which he had in view by the most exquisite reasons. Then, for the first time, was Scott afraid,

that most audacious clamourer, and, notwithstanding his loquaciousness, compelled to be silent. But still more important was the tribute which Sheridan received from the minister, whose enmity was overcome by the power of the orator; or else he was glad to embrace that opportunity of making some satisfaction for his former malignity.

“ At that time Sheridan displayed an abundance of wit, but without scurrility. His oratory was often facetious, flowing, and diffused; but neither redundant nor irregular. With vehemence and indignation it united a touching sensibility, while its force and splendor, its copiousness and variety, were always suited to the magnitude of the cause and the dignity of the accusation.

“ The applause with which this oration was received by an attentive senate is well known; and also that Sheridan, on this occasion, extorted praise from his adversaries, who were thus compelled to render homage to his excellence; and thus an immense addition was made, not only to his inoffensive and honourable popularity, but also to his solid and perpetual glory. Posterity will undoubtedly regard this discourse with renewed delight, and the readers of it will often have in their thoughts and their mouths, with a little alteration, the words of *Æschines*, “ Oh, that we had but heard him ourselves !”

This prediction, however, must fail, unless there is in existence a more exact copy of the oration

than the world has yet been favoured with; but of this there is but little probability; and even if such a manuscript should be in being, it may reasonably be questioned whether its effect in the perusal would be correspondent with the lofty praises bestowed upon it on the original delivery. When Cicero pronounced his famous oration for Ligarius, Cæsar, who had entered the court with the sentence of condemnation in his hand, was so much affected that he dropped the paper, and, even against conviction, acquitted the criminal. Yet this oration is still in existence; and, whatever be its merit as a composition, thus much may be said with confidence, that no one can read it without wondering how it could create any extraordinary emotion, or produce such a revolution in the mind of a judge.

CHAPTER XII.

Instance of political Equity.—Compliments paid to Mr. Pitt.—Judicious Protest of Lord Hood.—Reply to it by the Minister.—Mr. Sheridan opens the Seventh Charge.—Appointed one of the Managers of the Impeachment.—Struggle for the Appointment of Mr. Francis.

MR. SHERIDAN, at the close of his celebrated speech, called upon the House of Commons to vindicate the insulted character of justice ; to demonstrate its true quality, essence, and purpose, by rendering it, in the case of Mr. Hastings, active, inquisitive, and avenging. This language, however, was nothing when compared to the love of justice manifested by Mr. Fox and his friends in resisting the motion for an adjournment, and demanding an immediate decision of the question, without hearing what could be said on both sides. Those members who were for the delay, supported it by a reason that was at the same time highly complimentary to the accuser, and equitable to the person upon whose conduct they were called to decide. It was observed, that as they were still under the fascinating power of the magician's wand, it was requisite that they should have time to cool before they came to a determination. In

opposition to this judicious recommendation, it was vehemently contended that the proposed adjournment was contrary to parliamentary usage, and that the motive assigned for it was ridiculous; as if any custom could warrant a premature judgment on matters of serious import to the character of an individual, and the honour of a nation; or that there was any absurdity in the desire to pause for reflection and farther information, after having been charmed by the eloquence and astonished by the reasoning of a public accuser. This conduct, which was equally indecorous and unjust, exhibited too plainly the spirit in which the prosecution was conceived, and the object it had in view, notwithstanding the high pretensions to public virtue and impartiality continually made by the party with whom it originated.

On the following day the debate was renewed; and Mr. Pitt, while he assented to the motion for an impeachment, in a general conviction that the seizure of the treasures of the princesses of Oude was an unjustifiable proceeding, could not accede to the whole of the grounds of the accusation contained in the charge, or the inferences that had been drawn from them. This drew from Mr. Sheridan a very handsome acknowledgment of the pleasure which he felt in the reception of his motion, and at the liberality of the minister. Of such a compliment as that which he had received from the right honourable gentleman, Mr. Sheri-

dan observed, that he had reason to be proud ; because, conscious as he was that he stood up in a good cause, the advocate for millions, and the advocate for strict justice, to find that he was likely to prove successful could not but afford him the most solid satisfaction. He was the more happy also, as the right honourable gentleman by his conduct had proved that whatever differences existed between them, which sometimes occasioned warm altercations, yet when a great national question, that called for the aggregate support of parliament fell under consideration, their political divisions sunk into petty jars, and the minister was ready to come forward as one who felt for the honour and character of the country.

On the nineteenth of February Mr. Burke requested leave to call the attention of the house to the present state of the accusation of Mr. Hastings, which was attended with many unpleasant circumstances, owing, as he conceived, to a departure from the usual course of proceeding in matters of this nature. Having now come to a resolution upon two articles of charge, he thought that the house should resort to the ancient mode of voting the impeachment, and then take proper steps to prevent the accused party from quitting the kingdom, removing his property, alienating any sums of money, or taking any other course to evade the ends of justice. This suggestion, however, made no impression upon the house, and the investi-

gation of the remaining charges was proceeded in ; but on the second of the following month, when the conduct of Mr. Hastings towards the Nabob of Farruckabad came under consideration, a very unexpected opposition to the prosecution was made in a quarter, which, at an earlier stage of the business, would in all probability have proved fatal to the impeachment. The late venerable Lord Hood, in a very expressive and solemn manner, begged leave to call the serious attention of the house to the consequences of proceeding with too scrupulous a nicety in canvassing the conduct of those who had filled foreign stations of high difficulty and great importance. Certain actions, which may appear to persons at a distance in a very criminal light, were yet, on a nearer investigation, perfectly justifiable on the grounds of absolute and indispensable necessity. But should the fear of an impeachment by parliament be hung out to every commander, in whose hands was placed the defence of our national possessions, it must necessarily operate as a dangerous restraint to their exertions, when it was considered that no general or admiral had scarcely ever been fortunate enough to conduct himself in the performance of his duty, without occasionally falling into circumstances in which the public service compelled him to do things in themselves not pleasing to his feelings, nor perhaps strictly legal ; but which, from the indispensable necessity of their situation, were

perfectly justifiable. The example set by the House of Commons, in the present instance, would for ever stand before our future commanders, and create a great and dangerous clog to the public service. For his own part, the noble veteran observed, at his time of life he could have no prospect of being again employed in any foreign or active command, and therefore he had no personal inducement for the part he should take in giving his negative to any farther progress in this prosecution ; but he spoke for those who were to come after him : his regard for his country made him anxious to prevent a precedent by which all her services would for the future be greatly impeded ; and this, he was confident, would be the effect of punishing any harsh and severe, but perhaps necessary and indispensable acts of power which the saviour of India had been compelled to commit for the public good.

This plain but solid reasoning, which could not be refuted, conveyed so strong a censure upon the minister for the part he had imprudently taken in the agitation of this measure, that he was under the necessity of rising to offer an apology for his conduct.

It must be allowed that the vindication of Mr. Pitt was ingenious and subtle, but it was far from being satisfactory ; and it will admit of a doubt whether he was convinced himself that the line adopted by him in this business was the one,

which, in his official capacity, he ought to have chosen. He admitted the force of his lordship's arguments, but he endeavoured to shew that they did not apply in the present case, though it was impossible that a single individual in that house could have selected an instance in which they were more completely illustrated. The minister also confessed, that had the gallant admiral's observations on the merits of Mr. Hastings been brought forward in an early stage of the business, they might have been urged with some force, but that the period of their operation was past. Thus it should seem that the indiscreet resolutions of legislative bodies may be persevered in when they only affect individuals ; and that if the minister of a great nation, through policy or inadvertence, gives his countenance to a vexatious prosecution, it would be undignified to retrace his steps, even when he is convinced that he has been misled by artifice, or hurried into error by the impulse of his feelings.

The proposition for an impeachment on this part of the accusation was carried ; and on the second of April, previous to the bringing up of the report of the committee, Mr. Sheridan opened the seventh charge, relative to the corrupt receiving of bribes and presents. At the commencement of his speech on this occasion, he adverted, in very becoming terms, to the flattering treatment which he had experienced when he addressed the com-

mittee at an unusual length upon the subject of the third charge.

“Honoured with their almost unprecedented indulgence,” Mr. Sheridan said, “he would not offer so ungrateful a return to the liberality of their feelings as to suppose that they would not do him the justice to believe that it was far, indeed, from any great willingness on his part that he had been induced to trespass a second time upon their patience; but when he remembered that it would ill-become him to refuse his feeble aid to those who had, with equal zeal, in this momentous cause, stepped forward, as it was possible, under the inevitable restraints of an attention divided by occupations more multiplied and varied than his own;—when he considered the importance of the proceedings with respect to the impeachment of Mr. Hastings;—when he reflected how much the character of that house, and its honour, and what was still more material, the honour and the justice of the country, were implicated in the business;—when he consulted his own serious and sincere feelings on the subject—he could not refuse to lend himself to the occasion, and discharge his duty, by exerting his best endeavours to accelerate the progress of this interesting business, by assisting to draw it nearer to that conclusion, of which the distance appeared, at last, considerably diminished.”

But whatever might be the confidence of Mr.

Sheridan at this time respecting the speedy termination of the judicial inquiry in which he was embarked, his expectations were miserably disappointed, and Mr. Hastings had but too much reason to complain that all the oppressive acts of which he was accused were trifling indeed compared to the torture he was made to endure by this lengthened prosecution.

It must be allowed, that in stating the particulars on which this charge was grounded, Mr. Sheridan made out his case with great force and apparent clearness. He brought forward some instances, wherein considerable sums had been received by Mr. Hastings, in direct violation, according to the colour put upon the transactions, of an express act of parliament that had been passed for the regulation of the government of India. The representation now made of these circumstances was such, that it required the exercise of great diligence and perseverance to disentangle the real truth from the imagery and fiction with which it was artfully blended. At the period when these pretended bribes and presents were obtained, the desperate state of the company's affairs, and the embarrassed situation of England, laid open our eastern possessions to the attacks of any enemy; and it was only by these vigorous measures that Mr. Hastings could preserve the important post entrusted to his care. To provide for the exigencies of his government, and the means of

defending the country, he had recourse to those proceedings which necessity justified, and which history will praise; though, by a strange inversion of moral and political reasoning, they were alleged against him at home as rank and enormous crimes. They who did not take the trouble of examining into the state of our Indian territories, during the perilous conjuncture when Mr. Hastings was driven to these emergent proceedings, might naturally enough suspect that he was actuated solely by mercenary motives, and a desire to enrich himself, without any sense of the duty which he owed to his employers, or to the rights of those who were under his protection.

But it is impossible to make this apology for the conductors of the prosecution, who, from the course of their inquiries, and the documents in their possession, must have been well acquainted with the difficulties that called for these remedies, and with the public use to which the donations and loans now stigmatized as bribes and extortions were applied. To judge of the conduct of Mr. Hastings, from the sense imposed upon his actions by his accusers, and particularly in this speech on the seventh charge, he must have been a man of unbounded avarice, which increased by indulgence, and could never be satisfied. With equal justice, it was asserted that the country, which had for so many years been the seat of his government, was, in consequence of his rapacity, reduced from a state

of paradisaical luxuriance to the aridity of a desert. In short, such was the distorted view given of the administration of this persecuted man, that the wonder is how he should have been suffered to continue so many years without being called to account. His calumniators certainly must have calculated very much upon the strength of public credulity, and upon their own powers of misrepresentation, when they ventured to describe the object of their enmity as having exceeded in criminality all the despots of the east. According to their account, he could neither have had any apprehension of parliamentary investigation, nor of future retribution, while he was despoiling the people of their property, and devastating their country by the iniquity of his proceedings. Now, if this statement was correct, even to a limited extent, the proofs must have been abundant, and easy to procure; and yet, so far was this from being the case, that, after all the long speeches and vaunting declarations of the accusers, their charges frittered away into trifles undeserving of notice, none of which could be substantiated.

The ingenuity with which Mr. Sheridan framed his statement and arguments on the subject of the presents alleged to have been received by Mr. Hastings, for his own emolument, cannot be too much admired; but the art with which the orator kept out of sight the condition of the country at

that time, the ludicrous manner in which he treated the dispatches sent by the Governor-General to the directors, and, above all, the black malignity imputed to the disposition of the accused, will not admit of the slightest justification. The splendour of the style is no palliative for the calumnies which it conveys, and the perversion of facts is rendered worse by the elegance of the language and the richness of the imagery. Thus, for instance, while we are ready to praise, as it deserves, the literary merits of the following description, we cannot but condemn the spirit in which such a murky picture was conceived and sketched as a faithful delineation of the state of India under the government of Mr. Hastings.

“In conclusion,” observed Mr. Sheridan, “although within this rank but infinitely too fruitful wilderness of iniquities, within this dismal and unhallowed labyrinth, it was most natural to cast an eye of indignation and concern over the wide and towering forests of enormities, all rising in the dusky magnificence of guilt, and to fix the dreadfully excited attention upon the huge trunks of revenge, rapine, tyranny, and oppression;—yet it became not less necessary to trace out the poisonous weeds, the baleful brushwood, and all the little, creeping, deadly plants which were, in quantity and extent, if possible, more noxious. The whole range of this far-spreading

calamity was sown in the hot-bed of corruption, and had risen, by rapid and mature growth, into every species of illegal and atrocious violence!"

Among other arguments urged in defence of Mr. Hastings, it was rather incautiously observed, that the reception which he had met with from his employers, as well as from several persons in administration, sufficiently marked the high respect that was paid to his character and services by those who were most competent to form an estimate of his merits. The fair conclusion from this circumstance was, no doubt, in favour of the accused party, who was represented as having given offence to the directors of the company, by disobedience of their orders and the neglect of their interests. Still the courtesy with which he was treated was no evidence of his purity; and therefore it was imprudent of Major Scott to adduce these civilities as evidence of the innocence of his friend. His experience ought to have convinced him that the managers of this prosecution were not likely to be influenced by the judgment of any set of men unconnected with their own party; and that, on the contrary, what he advanced, would, in all probability, be turned into contempt, or laid hold of as a proof of conscious weakness. So indeed it proved, for on the following day Mr. Sheridan seized the first opportunity of challenging the Major to enter upon the subject of the merits of Mr. Hastings

as a set-off by way of balance against the charges of criminality; but this mode of dictating to members the line they should pursue was very properly reprehended by the minister, who, in his turn, came in for a portion of that sarcastic irony and caustic wit which Sheridan could command at his pleasure on any subject. Major Scott, while he declined the contest to which he had been invited, took the opportunity of explaining his own meaning, and of stating the inclinations of his friend. He denied the intention that had been insidiously imputed to him of attempting to set off the merits of Mr. Hastings as a covert for his obliquities; and so far was that gentleman from having recourse to such a species of defence, it was his most earnest wish to meet his accusers publicly before the highest tribunal in the kingdom, for which purpose he intreated that no obstacle might be thrown in the way of the impeachment. The same day a committee was appointed to prepare the articles for the prosecution, the name of Mr. Sheridan being the third on the list; but that of Mr. Francis was rejected by a great majority.

As there had been a violent quarrel between that gentleman and the Governor-General in India, which terminated in a duel, the insertion of his name in the list of managers was an act grossly offensive in itself, injurious to the person accused, and insulting to the dignity of the high court

of parliament. Notwithstanding, however, the obvious impropriety of such a nomination, the proposition was brought forward again at two subsequent stages of the business, and urged with uncommon vehemence by the party, but resisted with firmness by the minister, and constantly negatived by the house. The whole strength of the opposition was exerted to carry the appointment, and that with such zeal as to imply some very extraordinary motives in the persons who supported what none of them would have allowed to be compatible with the great principles of equity in any other case. Mr. Pitt, in his reply to their arguments, observed, very truly, that this was now become a question of mere feeling; and that as it was evident the gentlemen on the one side had their private considerations, which it would be improper to scrutinize, it was but fair that those who resisted the nomination as indecorous should enjoy their feelings undisturbed. Mr. Pitt reconciled his own vote for the prosecution, and that of his friends, with their present refusal to consent to the appointment of Mr. Francis, by putting this question: " Might it not be fairly said, that in their earnestness for the success of the impeachment, they chose to take from it every appearance of improper motives; and that in order to prevent even a suspicion of the existence of any such motives, they had declined to appoint, as their representative, the only

person who had, upon a former occasion, been concerned in a personal contest with Mr. Hastings?" Irresistible as this reasoning was, and preposterous as it would have been to arm an inveterate enemy of the accused party with the powers of a public prosecutor, when his proper station was that of an evidence, the motion was persisted in with great tenaciousness, and advocated by Mr. Sheridan with his wonted spirit, but certainly in a manner that did no more credit to his own judgment than to the liberality of his colleagues. In pleading for the appointment of Francis, he appears to have merely performed a task that had been set him by the party with whom he acted; and his alternate efforts to persuade the assembly, and to ridicule the minister, plainly evinced the difficulty under which he laboured, and the sense he had of his utter inability to shew by any sophistry or humour, that what was morally wrong could be politically right.

CHAPTER XIII.

Commercial Treaty with France.—Debates on Financial Questions.—Affairs of the Prince of Wales.—Reported Marriage of his Royal Highness to Mrs. Fitzherbert.—Abuses in the Post-Office.—Difference between Pitt and Grey.—Conduct of Sheridan on that Occasion.

AMONG the various subjects which engaged the serious consideration of parliament during this session, the commercial treaty that had been concluded with France in the preceding year was one of the most important. This was the favourite measure of Mr. Pitt, who defended it with parental partiality, and explained it in a manner that evinced a most extensive knowledge of foreign and domestic trade. The treaty, however, was investigated with equal acuteness and asperity by the leading members in the opposition, of whom Mr. Fox and Mr. Burke were by far the most considerable. Their reasoning was grounded principally on the ancient jealousy which divided the two countries, and the spirit of rivalry that naturally rendered them hostile to each other's interests as well in peace as in war.

This enmity on our part was justified by Mr. Fox in a strain of vehement indignation at the attempts made on the side of government to re-

move the prejudices which had so long prevented the two nations from entering into a state of commercial amity on a regulated basis and the principle of mutual confidence. It was earnestly contended that no change of circumstances could render the friendship of France desirable; for that the bad faith of the people was inherent, and their hatred to the English inveterate. The aversion of Mr. Fox to this connexion was expressed in the most unqualified terms of harsh severity towards the Gallic nation, with whom, according to his statement, it was impossible to form any league of long continuance or advantage. The violence with which this great orator treated France was not more remarkable than his tender feeling for the interests of Portugal, which he considered as materially injured by the present junction, and that in open violation of an express treaty. Such were the opinions of this eminent statesman at that period, before the tremendous revolution in France induced more favourable sentiments respecting that nation. Yet if ever his ideas of any people were completely realised and illustrated, it was in the progress of this great moral explosion, which threatened the utter destruction of social order throughout Europe, and the establishment of a universal system of despotic barbarism, beneath whose baneful sway all the energies of virtue would have withered, and every state within its grasp would have lost even the semblance of poli-

tical independence. But it was not one of the least remarkable consequences of that extraordinary event, that it occasioned a revolution in the minds of many intelligent and upright men, who, from viewing the French national character with suspicion, began all at once to regard it with extreme partiality. Among these was Mr. Fox, who reprobated the commercial treaty not merely in the terms, but in the principle, out of a radical dislike to the French; but when that people exhibited themselves to the life, as he had described them, this great man could see no harm in their doings, nor any danger in their friendship.

Throughout the discussion of this subject Mr. Sheridan distinguished himself with considerable activity; but his opposition to the commercial treaty was almost exclusively confined to the supposed injury rendered to the trade and manufactures of Ireland. His arguments, however, were of little weight, and he could scarcely supply the lack of matter by the display of wit; because in so doing, he must have laid himself and the Irish people open to ridicule for having resisted the boon held out by the British parliament some time before, as an encouragement to the improvement of commerce in that kingdom, far exceeding any advantages to be derived from an intercourse with France, which country wanted none of her commodities. But if there was a deficiency of reasoning and humour on this question, it was

amply made up by offensive personality. Mr. Sheridan appeared as if he lay in wait to catch at that part of the minister's statements which would furnish him with some keen strokes of attack and exultation; accordingly, when the reduction of the duty on brandies was mentioned, and Mr. Pitt observed that he meditated a still greater reduction at an early day, with a view to extend the system so happily commenced three years before, to the great prevention and abolition of smuggling, his antagonist arose, and in a tone of triumph declared, that the right honourable gentleman had now confessed the utter failure of his famous commutation plan for the abolition of smuggling. This was certainly taking great liberties with the declaration of the minister, who, whatever might have been his error in regard to the efficacy of the measure, had by no means spoken of it as an absolute remedy for the evil which it was calculated to redress. Mr. Pitt, in his reply, could not avoid uttering some warm expressions; and, among others, in accusing Sheridan of gross misrepresentation, he said, that he could hardly tell which most to admire, his ignorance or his confidence. This seems to have been what the other aimed at; for it furnished him with an opportunity to retort in a style of equal asperity upon his great opponent, observing, "that the ill manners of the right honourable gentleman were not more conspicuous than the

weakness of his conduct in charging him with confidence and ignorance, without a single argument to prove the foundation of any such charge." Mr. Sheridan, however, in saying this, had forgotten that argument was out of the question on a simple matter of fact, in which he was himself the asserter and Mr. Pitt the denier of words alleged to have been used by the minister in former debates. Even on the supposition that the benefit of the commutation tax had been anticipated beyond its merits, the error was very excusable; nor could there be any occasion for adverting to it in the present instance, unless it was to take advantage of an oversight for the purpose of embarrassing the minister in the prosecution of one great public business, by charging him with having fallen into a mistake in the operation of another. Mr. Sheridan accused the minister of quibbling about words; but in reality the quibbling belonged to himself, in garbling a speech delivered on a former occasion, to suit his present object. This he was forced to acknowledge in his explanation, by saying, that if Mr. Pitt did not make use of the word "entirely," when predicting the effects of the commutation act on smuggling, he had certainly gone so far as to say that the plan would put an end to the contraband trade "in a very great degree;" or words to that effect. Now it must have been obvious to all who heard him, that this last qualification com-

pletely refuted what he had so peremptorily advanced, and justified the chancellor of the exchequer from the charge of having ventured to give a positive assurance upon the subject.

Yet the remembrance of this altercation seems to have been very unpleasantly felt by Sheridan; for in a renewed debate on the commercial treaty, three days afterwards, he made another effort to grapple with the minister on the correctness of his statements, the extent of his knowledge in trade, and the deficiencies of his plan, by which the interests of this country, and particularly those of Ireland, were capriciously sacrificed to indulge an unnatural connexion. Having attacked the measure in general terms, he concluded with expressing a hope that he should hear no more the charge of confidence and ignorance from the right honourable gentleman, who must be confident and ignorant beyond all example, if he thought that no more resolutions were necessary to be moved on the treaty with France. To convince him that there were various additional resolutions necessary, Mr. Sheridan said he would bring down a string of resolutions, and submit the same to him and the house whether they were not absolutely requisite to be moved in a committee.

In answer to this uncourteous address, which certainly did little credit to the temper or judgment of the speaker, Mr. Pitt observed, with more calmness than usual, “ that the honourable gen-

tleman had found fault with him for his patience in sitting still, and not interrupting him ; although, he confessed, the unprovoked language which he had used towards him, would, if he could feel any thing from his asperity, have been a sufficient temptation for him to have interfered in his self-defence. He could not help observing, however, on the instructions which he had received from the honourable gentleman, that they were so conciliating, so winning, so sincere, and seemed to have so little of any intention to gratify the person who delivered them, and to be so entirely calculated for the benefit of the person to whom they were addressed, that he could not but return the honourable gentleman his warmest thanks for the obligation."

The ironical compliment with which Mr. Pitt concluded was taken in good part by his opponent, who endeavoured to vindicate himself from the charge of having used any asperities, or expressed himself in a style of petulant anger, saying, that if his language was liable to be so construed, the right honourable gentleman had given him a piece of information for which he was sure the house would think he ought to confess himself indebted. In every stage of the business Mr. Sheridan continued to give it his opposition, but without adducing any new arguments, or making the smallest impression upon the house, when an address of congratulation to his Majesty was carried, in spite

of a motion for an adjournment made by him ; and the bill was equally successful both there and in the Lords.

Mr. Sheridan was not more fortunate in his attempts to combat the minister on financial subjects ; and yet it is singular that these were favourite points on which he delighted to display his eloquence, though every person who was at all acquainted with his habits well knew his incompetency to the task of investigating public accounts. A striking instance of his skill in political arithmetic appeared in the pertinacious opposition which he gave to the sinking fund system, even after the substantial benefits of it were realised ; and when the other celebrated measure of Mr. Pitt was brought forward, for the consolidation of the duties of customs and excise, a bill which drew from Burke the warmest eulogiums, though Sheridan did not attack the principle of the act, he found fault in detail, and divided against it on the third reading. In the same session he made an eloquent speech in reply to the minister, on the opening of the budget for the current year, in which he claimed the credit of having warned Mr. Pitt repeatedly of the fallacy of the principles of the board of revenue, and appealed to the statement then produced as abounding in evidence of what he had advanced. He maintained that the finances of the country were not in the flourishing state which had been repre-

sented; and he went so far as to say, that the new plans of increase were merely temporary, so as to render it impossible for them to constitute a permanent revenue. New taxes, therefore, must be levied, or some strong measures adopted, to render the income superior to the expenditure. Among other sources stated in the budget, the East India Company had been mentioned, with some degree of exultation, as capable of rendering efficient assistance to the exigencies of the state. This was so palpable a refutation of all the fictitious tales of misery and insolvency which were industriously circulated to the injury of the company, merely to serve as an apology for the famous India Bill of the opposition, that it could not well pass without some observation. Accordingly, Mr. Sheridan first denied the account now given of the flourishing state of the company, and afterwards, in explanation, he maintained that his authorities for the positions advanced by him on the real situation of things in India were indisputable. This called up Mr. (now Lord) Grenville, who, conceiving that Sheridan had alluded to information obtained by him when engaged in the secret committee on India affairs, during the period of his being in administration, charged that board with an indiscreet use of their powers. Upon this Mr. Burke rose to exculpate himself and the rest of the committee from the imputation cast upon them; and at the same time took the oppor-

tunity of making this strange excuse for Mr. Sheridan, that though he was a member of the committee, he had assisted them only once, and that then he gave them his company only for half an hour. Of this dilemma, into which Burke, out of an eagerness to screen himself, had thrown his friend, Mr. Grenville did not fail to take an immediate advantage, by saying, that the committee were fully cleared from the charge of having abused their trust; so that therefore, instead of Mr. Sheridan being liable to the suspicion which he had suggested of his speaking from too good information on the subject of the state of the company's affairs in the east, it was now evident that he had spoken from no information at all. This, to be sure, was a home thrust which required no small address to parry: and so Mr. Sheridan found it; for he contented himself with replying, "that when the right honourable gentleman thought fit to argue upon the degree of information from which he had spoken, he would have acted with propriety in resting the argument on what he admitted to be the information in his possession, and not on what any other person stated it to be. He alone could be a judge of the information in his mind, and the sources from whence it was derived. What he had hinted at was obtained from indisputable authority, and such as he could not be ashamed of stating to the house."

It must be confessed that the defence set up by

Mr. Sheridan, if it can be properly called a defence, was one of the weakest that could have been made, though, in all probability, it was the only one that lay in his power.

He might, indeed, pretend to be well convinced of the truth of what he reported, and have a full reliance upon the authority from whence he had obtained his information, but he could have no right to claim either for his own judgment, or the credit of his anonymous adviser, the implicit confidence of other persons. It argued, indeed, as little respect for the assembly where he stood, as it did feeling for those who might be injured by his representations, to say that he was the sole judge of what had been secretly communicated to him, and of their integrity who had imparted that statement of the affairs of the India Company, upon which so much stress was laid, to depreciate the character of that great commercial body, and consequently to weaken the hands of government.

The public mind was, about this time, very much agitated by the embarrassed circumstances of the Prince of Wales, and still more by some strange rumours which were generally circulated respecting an imprudent matrimonial connexion alleged to have been formed by his Royal Highness with Mrs. Fitzherbert, a widow lady of an ancient Roman catholic family, and herself a zealous member of the same communion. From the share which Mr. Sheridan had in the public discussion

of these questions, and the confidential trust reposed in him by both parties, it will be proper to give in this place as detailed an account, as can be relied upon, of a subject, which, being matter of national history, is necessarily of general importance. The establishment of the household of his Royal Highness took place on his coming of age in 1783, at which time the coalition ministry was in power, with the principal members of which party the Prince had been long and intimately associated. The greatest exertions were then made by the majority of the cabinet to procure a yearly settlement for his Royal Highness of one hundred thousand pounds; but this was opposed by others, and most strongly by the King, who assigned as his reason, that an inexperienced youth ought not to be entrusted with an extravagant income, the diffusion of which would only gratify the cravings of numerous parasites and panders, without adding to his own personal comfort, virtue, or dignity. In proportion, however, as the sovereign was firmly bent upon consenting only to a moderate establishment suitable to the rank of an unmarried heir apparent, and with a proper regard to the exhausted state of the country, after a lengthened, expensive, and disastrous war, so resolved were the persons who called themselves the friends of the Prince to carry their point for the magnificent settlement which they had projected. Matters, indeed, began to assume a very unpleasant

aspect between the monarch and his ministers on this subject; and it certainly must be granted, that even though the latter might be right in proposing the grant upon so extended a scale, they were wrong in persisting with obstinacy to extort it in opposition to the sentiments of the illustrious personage, who felt for his people as well as for his son. But ministers, with the exception of one or two, were not to be governed by the principle of delicacy, that ought to have actuated them in the negotiation of an affair which particularly affected the private feelings of the sovereign, to whom they behaved with an air of assumption almost bordering upon incivility. When things were driven to an extremity that almost approximated to a change of administration, the Prince, to whom the conduct of the party was not in reality more respectful than to his royal parent, interposed, and insisted, with a spirit which did him infinitely more honour than the utmost grant would have yielded pleasure, that the settlement should be left solely to the discretion of the sovereign. But while he signified his earnest wish that the whole business should be left to the King, and declared his readiness to accept whatever His Majesty might think most proper; he, at the same time, manifested his regard for those who had so zealously and imprudently advocated his cause, by urging his intreaty that no farther misunderstanding should subsist between the King and his ministers.

In consequence of this generous and dutiful interposition, the dispute was accommodated, and an allowance of fifty thousand a-year, payable out of the civil list, was settled upon his Royal Highness. This income, however, proved in a short time inadequate to the purposes for which it was designed; or rather, in more correct language, the expenditure of the Prince went so far beyond his means, that in three years he had contracted a debt of above one hundred thousand pounds, exclusive of fifty thousand more laid out in improvements upon Carlton House.

The attempt made to account for this prodigious excess, by attributing it to the high price of all the articles of ordinary consumption, was not more weak than imprudent, because the slightest inspection of the general schedule of the debts shewed that neither the necessaries nor the elegancies of life were among the real causes of the difficulties which occurred. But it was still more unwisely observed, that the embarrassed state of the Prince's affairs would have been prevented, had the settlement originally proposed been allowed to take place: for, on the contrary, the rapidity with which the existing incumbrances had accumulated afforded a decisive proof that an increased income would, in fact, only have produced a multiplied expenditure.

The conduct of the Prince, on being apprised of the real state of his circumstances, was highly ho-

nourable to his feelings, for instead of treating the matter with indifference, he applied to the King for relief. By his Majesty's directions, a full account of the affairs of his Royal Highness was laid before him, which certainly indicated an intention to afford the desired assistance; but upon a minute investigation, some particulars were discovered which gave so much disquietude, that a positive refusal was communicated to the Prince by one of the first officers of the state.

What could have induced this peremptory and seemingly harsh resolution, after an evident disposition to consider the subject with a view to grant the application for succour, has never yet been made known, and perhaps it would be improper to conjecture. But as the accounts of the debts underwent a closer investigation, in consequence of the disapprobation frequently expressed in regard to the connexions of the Prince, it is probable that some disclosures were made, which the inflexible morality of the sovereign could not pass over without censure. Certain it is, that the royal displeasure was very strongly marked; and as it continued for a long period, it is reasonable to believe that the cause was of no trivial import. Thus disappointed in his expectations of relief from that quarter on which he had placed the fullest reliance, his Royal Highness had recourse to a measure which was extolled by some as an act of great magnanimity,

while by others it was considered as rash, and unbecoming of his high station. That it was not deliberate and well advised is clear, from the hastiness with which the expedient was suggested and adopted; for on the very day after he had received the King's message, his Royal Highness dismissed the officers of his court, reduced his establishment to that of a private gentleman, ordered his horses to be publicly sold, and the works that were carrying on at Carlton House to be discontinued.

From these savings, the annual sum of forty thousand pounds was intended to be set apart, and vested in the hands of trustees, for the payment of the creditors. Had his Royal Highness been a private nobleman, this conduct would have deserved the highest praise; but this was not the case, for the establishment which he enjoyed, though perhaps not altogether equal to his rank, was a public concern, and could not be laid aside without affecting the national character. Economy was commendable, and it might have been successfully adopted, even in this case, without eclipsing the splendour of royalty, or taking away those distinctions which belonged to the heir apparent of the monarchy. The debts had not been of long standing, and considering the rates of charges that are usual in such circumstances, a proportionate degree of credit might have been obtained without proclaiming an alarming declaration of insolvency

to the world. It is not, therefore, surprising that this precipitate resolution should have given additional offence, where very reasonable grounds of dissatisfaction already existed; for it was obvious that a proceeding of this nature could not pass without exciting much obloquy; and that while some would censure the licentiousness which gave occasion for so great a sacrifice on the part of the Prince, others would not be wanting in venting their reproaches on the supposed severity and parsimony with which he was treated. The King certainly considered the act as intentionally committed, to render the Prince popular at his expense; and it was very natural that he should entertain that opinion, when it was done in a sudden and open manner, without consulting either him or his ministers. His Majesty undoubtedly had a right to reject the application that was made to him for the liquidation of equivocal debts, and others that were far from admitting any justifiable apology; yet, on the other side, it became his Royal Highness to have paused before he adopted the counsels of men whose concern for his honour was manifested in their regard to the feelings of his father.

How deeply his Majesty resented the conduct of the Prince on this occasion may be estimated from the fact, that when his Royal Highness hastened to Windsor, in August, 1786, on hearing of the attempt that had been made upon the life of the King, he was not suffered to appear in

his presence. This breach could not fail to create a general sensation, both at home and abroad; and it was the more regretted, on account of the amiable manners, pleasing affability, and liberal disposition of the Prince, which rendered him deservedly the favourite of the people.

It has been said that the Duke of Orleans, the richest individual in Europe, who was then in a state of exile in England, under the displeasure of the French king, pressed his Royal Highness in the strongest manner to make use of his fortune to any extent till some favourable change should take place in his circumstances. But this offer the Prince very prudently declined to accept; and the same public principle withheld him also from availing himself of those resources which the usurious speculations of monied men are well known to keep constantly open in this nation to the temporary wants of the necessitous. As this narrative has been minutely detailed by Mr. Burke in the Annual Register, of which he was the compiler, no doubt can be formed of its being, as far as it goes, a correct statement; but it is also as evident that this ingenious writer has laboured to keep in the back-ground many particulars which would have thrown strong light upon the history of these transactions. The whole truth, however, he could not well relate without implicating several of his most intimate associates; and thus we have another instance of the little reliance that is to be placed

upon the records of events, in which political parties are concerned, and of which their adherents are the historians.

The friendships which princes contract are too frequently the great cause of their misfortunes; for as few men can be found bold enough to inform them of their errors, and as many find an interest in ministering to their follies, the chance is, that their confidence and favour will be placed where they meet with the least hesitation or scruple about the measure of obedience. In the present case, it is to be lamented that the Prince, instead of making one kind of sacrifice, which, by wearing the appearance of defiance rather than submission, increased the difference between him and the King, did not make another of greater importance, by which that breach might have been effectually healed. But, unfortunately, they who brought him into his difficulties, or who contributed chiefly to aggravate them by their management and advice, still held their influence over his mind, and were considered as his tried and chosen friends. The amenity of his own disposition inclined him to esteem those who were alike distinguished by their frankness and urbanity; and his love of pleasant conversation made him fond of the company of men who could enliven the social hour by the readiness of their wit, or the variety of their information.

Among these, Sheridan held a distinguished

place; and from the time that he was first introduced to his Royal Highness by Mr. Fox, he continued progressively to gain ground in his confidence, till it was a difficult matter to ascertain which of the two enjoyed his favour in the greatest degree. It would be uncharitable to say that an undue advantage was taken of this intimacy for any sinister purposes; but it is due to the interests of truth to observe that a more unfit man in the world to have acted as the secret adviser of the Prince could not have been found than Mr. Sheridan. Prodigal and thoughtless himself, he was totally unqualified to lend any effectual assistance to others; and having no very refined ideas of delicacy, or regular principles of conduct, his counsel in cases of a high moral nature would naturally take a turn and complexion from the character of his own mind. We may, indeed, very plainly see a strong portion of his genius and sensibility in the impetuous measure of breaking up the establishment of the royal household; and the next proceeding to which the Prince resorted, was, beyond all question, the project of a secret cabinet, wherein Sheridan had a principal concern. Mr. Burke, indeed, in his narrative, has endeavoured to represent the parliamentary interference on the subject as a mere spontaneous act of some independent members of the House of Commons, who felt for the situation of his Royal Highness. But in reality the business was under-

taken by the opposition, of which the historian was a member, and on that account he lay under the necessity of giving such a view of it as should free it from the imputation of being a party question, though, at the same time, in the course of his relation, it will be seen that he has been obliged to admit the fact, and therefore in this account it will be proper to adopt his words.

“ It was in these circumstances of private distress and public spirit, that the expedient was suggested to his Royal Highness by several respectable members of the House of Commons, of appealing to the justice and generosity of the nation in parliament. To this measure the Prince appears to have assented, not more from a natural wish to free himself from his pecuniary embarrassments, than from a desire to do away any bad impression that the misfortune of having incurred the royal displeasure, and the consequent refusal of affording him any relief, might have left upon the mind of the public.

“ Accordingly, on the twentieth of April, previous to the opening of the budget, Alderman Newnham demanded of the chancellor of the exchequer whether it was the intention of ministers to bring forward any proposition for rescuing the Prince of Wales from his distressed situation? To this question Mr. Pitt replied, that it was not his duty to bring forward a subject of this nature except by the command of his Majesty. It was not

necessary, he added, that he should say more in answer to the question that had been proposed to him, than that he had not been honoured with such a command. Upon this the alderman gave notice of his intentions to bring the subject regularly before the house on the fourth of May,

“In the mean time the friends of the Prince were indefatigable in their endeavours to procure the support of the independent members of parliament to the proposed question ; and at several meetings which were held for the purpose, their numbers were so considerable, as to give serious cause of alarm to the minister.

“On the twenty-fourth of April, Mr. Pitt, after requesting that Mr. Newnham would inform the house more particularly of the nature of the motion he intended to make, adverted to the extreme delicacy of the subject, and declared that the knowledge he possessed of many circumstances relating to it made him extremely anxious to persuade the house, if possible, to prevent the discussion of it. Should, however, the honourable member persist in his determination to bring it forward, it would be necessary to lay those circumstances before the public ; and however distressing it might prove to him as an individual, from the profound respect he had for every part of the royal family, he should discharge his duty to the public, by entering fully into the subject. At

the same time Mr. Rolle declared that the question involved matter, by which the constitution, both in church and state, might be essentially affected: and therefore, if the friends of the Prince of Wales persisted in their attempt, it would be necessary to inquire into those circumstances also.”*

The observations of the minister referred solely to the pecuniary affairs of the Prince, and to some particulars which were connected with the proceedings adopted for the liquidation of his debts. But the allusion of the Devonshire member was simply to the reports then generally in circulation, respecting a marriage said to have been solemnized according to the forms of the Roman church with Mrs. Fitzherbert. These rumours, according to the statement of the opposition, were only propagated for the most malignant purpose, to mislead the ignorant, and to influence the minds of the vulgar; which might possibly have been the case; but, considering that they were very widely diffused, and supported by persons of no ordinary ability, it was the obvious duty of every Englishman, especially of every member of parliament, to bring the matter forward in such a manner as should settle the question completely, for the honour of the Prince and the satisfaction of the nation.

On the twenty-seventh of the same month, Alderman Newnham signified to the house that

* Dodsley's Annual Register for 1787, p. 126.

the motion he intended to make would be to this effect:—"That a humble address be presented to his Majesty, praying him to take into his royal consideration the present embarrassed state of the affairs of the Prince of Wales, and to grant him such relief as his royal wisdom should think fit, and that the house would make good the same." Several members on both sides having risen to deprecate the farther discussion of the business, with a wish that it might be accommodated in another manner, Mr. Sheridan apologized for being of a different opinion, and strongly urged the necessity of proceeding with the address, on account of the insinuations and menaces which had been thrown out on a former occasion. "It would be ridiculous," he said, "for any person on such a subject to obtrude himself without sufficient authority; and for his part he could declare, on the very best and highest authority, that neither the friends of the Prince, nor his Royal Highness himself, had any other wish than that every circumstance in the whole series of his conduct should be most minutely and accurately investigated; and those who felt most for his situation were ready to meet, and anxious to enter upon, every species of inquiry that should be suggested. It was the decided wish of his Royal Highness that no part of his conduct, circumstances, or situation, should be treated with ambiguity, concealment, or affected tenderness; but that whatever related

to him should be discussed openly, and with fair, manly, and direct examination."

Mr. Sheridan laid considerable stress in the course of his speech upon the observations which had fallen from the chancellor of the exchequer, and the member for Devonshire, both of which he affected to consider as having the same object. This drew from Mr. Pitt a candid declaration that he had no intention to cast any imputation upon the character of the Prince, and that what he had advanced alluded solely to the temporary embarrassments of his Royal Highness, and the correspondence to which it had given rise. Mr. Rolle observed that he had acted, and should continue to act, as became an independent country gentleman to do when the dearest interests of the nation were at stake, from the conviction of his own mind; and that if the motion proposed was persisted in, he should state, without reserve, his sentiments upon the subject alluded to by him, according as the matter should appear to his judgment.

Nothing, however, conclusive, nor any thing very elucidatory, took place in this irregular conversation, which appears to have been managed for the purpose of ascertaining the general feelings of members, and of making an impression upon the public. Mr. Sheridan laboured with great zeal, not only in behalf of the illustrious person under whose authority he acted, but also in vindicating

his party from a charge which does not appear to have been made—that they had fomented the divisions then prevailing in the royal family. “Such a difference,” he said, “so far from assisting, must materially injure those who were not admitted into his Majesty’s councils, and whose opposition was not founded on any little personal animosities, but on broad, solid, constitutional grounds.” To this flourish of parliamentary logic, it might have been reasonably answered, that the earnestness to defend, where no accusation had been brought, was more calculated to create suspicion than to remove it; and that if Mr. Sheridan and his party were cleared of the charge of fomenting discord, it was not so easy to free them from that of having been the primary cause of it. The publicity of their connexion with the Prince, the boast which they made of their ascendancy over him, and his open support of the opposition by voting with the minority in one house, and attending popular debates in the other, were evident proofs that the party had not so used their influence with his Royal Highness as to preserve harmony in the family. On the contrary, it was notorious that the leaders of the opposition were not only the confidential advisers of the Prince, but that they were admitted to be the companions of his social hours, sharing with him in his amusements, while he condescended to become a member of their clubs. After all this,

nothing could be more ridiculous or ungrateful than the attempt made in the House of Commons to shift the odium of the existing differences from the opposition to his Royal Highness; for such, in fact, must have been the conclusion, if the assertion had been true, that they were no way concerned in producing those difficulties under which the Prince was then labouring. Indirect reflections were made, it is true, upon his Majesty for an undue severity, but in doing this the party left the Prince to bear the entire burthen of the charge of prodigality; from which conduct a very correct estimate may be formed of the integrity of their principles and the sincerity of their attachment.

Alderman Newnham, who had been chosen, for obvious reasons, to bring this business forward, renewed the consideration of it three days afterwards, in an allusion to what occurred in the former debate. He remarked that much had been said of the tenderness of the ground upon which he was treading, and of the dangerous consequences that might arise from his perseverance. He declared himself totally ignorant of the grounds of those apprehensions with which others were so unaccountably filled; but if there was any danger in the measure, let those who gave occasion to it tremble at the consequences. He neither saw any himself, nor did the Prince see any: and it was by the express desire of his Royal Highness that

he now gave notice of his intention to pursue his object. Highly honoured, as he conceived himself to be, by the confidence of the Prince upon this occasion, he was not to be intimidated; and he could assure the house, that neither was his Royal Highness to be deterred from his purpose by the base and false rumours which were spread abroad to his discredit.

Mr. Fox, who had been absent on the former debate, came down this day, with immediate authority from the Prince, to assure the house there was no part of his conduct that he was either afraid or unwilling to have fully investigated. With regard to the private correspondence between the Prince and his Majesty, Mr. Fox said he wished to have it laid before the house, because he could take upon himself to assert that it would prove the conduct of his Royal Highness to have been in the highest degree amiable, and would present as uniform and perfect a picture of duty and obedience as ever had been shewn from a son to his father, or from a subject to his sovereign. With regard to the allusions that had been made to something full of danger to the church and state, Mr. Fox added, that he wished the honourable member had spoken more explicitly: but if he alluded to a certain low and malicious rumour which had been industriously propagated, he was authorised to declare that it was a complete falsehood. After expressing his surprise that such a tale, fit

only to impose upon the lowest of the vulgar, should for one moment have been received with credit by any person in that house, Mr. Fox concluded by saying, that he was fully authorised by his Royal Highness to declare that he was ready, as a peer of parliament, to answer in his place any questions that could be put to him respecting this report, or to afford his Majesty or his ministers any other assurances of satisfaction that they might require.

Mr. Rolle in his reply observed, that Mr. Fox had said the fact alluded to was impossible to have happened, which undoubtedly was correct as far as related to a legal solemnization of marriage, for that there were certain statutes which forbade it: but still, as it might have taken place in an irregular manner, he wished for satisfaction on that point.

To this Mr. Fox answered, that though he was of opinion what he had stated was quite sufficient, he was willing, if possible, to convince the most incredulous mind; and therefore, when he denied the calumny, he meant, in so doing, not merely with regard to the effect of certain laws, but in respect to the simple fact, which not only never could have happened legally, but in truth never had happened in any way whatsoever. Mr. Rolle then asked of the right honourable gentleman whether what he had said came from direct authority; to which Mr. Fox as promptly replied that he had such authority.

A pause ensued, which was interrupted by Mr. Sheridan, who charged Mr. Rolle with very unhandsome behaviour, in sitting silent after receiving so explicit an answer: to which the member for Devonshire very briefly but pointedly replied, "that nothing which the honourable gentleman could say would induce him to act otherwise than to his judgment should appear proper. The right honourable gentleman certainly had answered him, and the house would judge for themselves of the propriety of that answer."

This declaration of an independent mind could not satisfy the impetuous spirit of Sheridan, who returned to the attack in language of extreme haughtiness, amounting to menace; for he concluded with observing, that "if the honourable gentleman did not choose to say that he was satisfied, the house ought to come to a resolution that it was seditious and disloyal to propagate reports injurious to the character of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, and thus by authority discountenance the report."

Mr. Rolle, however, was not to be intimidated into any concession, or the expression of sentiments which probably he did not feel, merely to gratify the particular inclinations of persons who were governed, in some respects, by interested and partial motives. He resolutely maintained his right, as a member of parliament unconnected with any party, to bring forward a subject which equally

affected the Prince and the country, in order to ascertain whether the rumour in circulation had any basis for its support; and that, having performed his duty, the result lay with the house, and not with his opinion. Mr. Pitt here interposed, and in strong terms reprobated the attack which had been made on the freedom of debate and the liberty of speech by Mr. Sheridan, who observed in reply, that no one more respected that privilege than he did; but that he was unconscious of having said any thing which looked like an infringement of that freedom. The insinuation thrown out by the honourable gentleman relative to the Prince of Wales had been met by a direct refutation of the calumny to which that insinuation pointed: and when it appeared that the denial came from the highest authority, he refused to say whether he was satisfied, or to take the most effectual means of discovering the truth. This, Mr. Sheridan observed, was the exact state of the case; and therefore he appealed to the house and the minister, whether the silence of the honourable gentleman was manly, fair, or candid; concluding again with saying, that the house ought to declare by a resolution that it was seditious and disloyal to propagate reports injurious to the character of the Prince of Wales.

Mr. Grey supported the same argument, and with similar vehemence; but after some farther observations by the chancellor of the exchequer,

in vindication of Mr. Rolle, the dispute ended without any motion.

It has been stated that the favourable impression which this debate produced with respect to the open and manly conduct of the Prince, gave the minister such a serious apprehension of being left in the minority, that the next day overtures were made to his Royal Highness to settle the business by a private accommodation. Accordingly, on Thursday, the third of May, Mr. Pitt had an audience at Carlton House; and the same night the Prince was informed, by his Majesty's command, in general terms, that if the motion intended to be made the next day in the House of Commons should be withdrawn, every thing might be settled to the satisfaction of his Royal Highness. The next day, when the house assembled, which was very full, Mr. Alderman Newnham rose in his place, and stated that he felt great pleasure in informing the house that his motion was no longer necessary. The satisfaction manifested on both sides at this information induced Mr. Sheridan to make some remarks contrary to the advice of the minister, who had expressed his wish that no farther conversation on the subject should take place. But, prudent as this recommendation undoubtedly was, the orator took no farther notice of it than by considering it as an assumption of credit on the part of ministers for having terminated the business so amicably; after which he

launched out into an extravagant eulogium, first upon the Prince, and lastly upon Mrs. Fitzherbert. Of the former he said, in allusion to his connexion with opposition, and the supposed influence of that party on his resolutions, that "in truth, the measures which had been adopted were the result of his Royal Highness's own judgment, which none but those who did not know him could consider as needing the aid of any other person's counsel." Mr. Sheridan next adverting to the readiness of the Prince to lay the whole of his conduct open, and to answer any question that might be proposed to him, paid a compliment to parliament for abstaining from such an inquiry out of regard to the feelings of his Royal Highness. "But," he concluded, "whilst these feelings have no doubt been properly considered on this occasion, I must take the liberty of saying that there is another person entitled in every delicate and honourable mind to the same attention; one to whom I will not venture to allude, but by saying that it is a name which malice or ignorance only can attempt to injure, and whose character and conduct claim, and are entitled to, the truest respect."

The ingenuity and elegance of this panegyrical oration could not disguise its glaring inconsistencies, for the praise bestowed upon the Prince, on account of his conduct under his difficulties, was a keen satire upon those who had contributed

to bring him into that trying situation which called for the exercise of his fortitude and judgment. Of the other eulogium, it would be improper to say any thing; but the same prudence which restrains observation now, ought to have imposed silence upon Sheridan at a moment when the public attention was generally drawn to a mysterious connexion, which, as it required explanation, was therefore open to suspicion; but which suspicion this encomium was so little calculated to remove, that, on the contrary, it only served to render the subject still more perplexing.

A curious altercation took place on the fifteenth of the same month between the minister and Mr. Sheridan, in the discussion of a question brought forward by Mr. Grey, respecting certain transactions in the Post-Office. It appeared that some differences having arisen between Lord Tankerville and Lord Carteret, joint post-masters-general, with regard to the detection of a variety of abuses in different branches of that establishment, the former nobleman was dismissed, as it was said, for the zeal shewn by him on that occasion, in opposition to the opinion of his colleague. Mr. Grey in consequence moved for the appointment of a committee to inquire into these abuses, which motion was resisted by the present Earl of Lauderdale, then Lord Maitland, on the ground that it arose rather from resentment than justice, and looked as if it were founded on pique, with a view

to keep Lord Carteret in a very disagreeable predicament, by calling his character in question, and not allowing him, owing to the lateness of the session, an immediate opportunity of clearing it from all imputation. His lordship was answered by Mr. Sheridan, who seems to have interfered rather for the purpose of attacking the minister than of defending Mr. Grey, for he went pretty fully into an examination of the bill brought in by Mr. Pitt to reform the public offices, and which he considered as evincing a striking proof that the right honourable gentleman dealt only in professions. Mr. Sheridan observed that he had opposed the bill when it was first in agitation, and pronounced then that it would prove ineffectual, of which they had now a decisive evidence in the motion of his honourable friend.

The chancellor of the exchequer asserted his belief that the honourable gentleman had spoken with his usual sincerity, when he said that the charge against him was the principal object of his speech ; and he did not at all doubt, but that when it was considered what use ingenuity might make of reports to disseminate stories and tales to his prejudice, that the opportunity of doing so was the chief reason which induced gentlemen to be so anxious for the proposed inquiry.

Sheridan, upon this, observed that the minister had treated his charge as a mere piece of irony, on which Mr. Pitt said across the table : “ Direct-

ly the reverse ; in that I admit and believe you to be sincere." The other then resumed his speech, and said : " Well, I am glad the right honourable gentleman admits that I generally speak with sincerity." But this attempt to catch at more credit than was intended would not pass, and Mr. Pitt corrected the speaker by saying, " No, not so ; but in what you have this day said against me." Mr. Sheridan again rallied, and went into a long and desultory argument to prove that the chancellor of the exchequer dealt more in professions than in substantial acts. In the course of this debate, some expressions having fallen from Mr. Pitt which Mr. Grey understood as reflecting upon his motives in undertaking the present enquiry, the latter rose with great warmth, and said, that conscious as he was of being actuated by fair and honourable considerations, no man should dare to impute unworthy motives to him. Upon this, the chancellor of the exchequer and Mr. Sheridan rose together ; but as the avowed object of the latter was to promote harmony by conciliatory explanation, he was heard first. He then said that his honourable friend had clearly mistaken the meaning of the chancellor of the exchequer, whose words, hastily heard, might at their first sound have made the sort of impression which he perceived they had done, though he was ready to admit that this was not their true meaning.

At the close of the same session Mr. Sheridan brought forward his promised motion for a reform of the royal boroughs of Scotland; but as this was founded on a petition from the inhabitants of Glasgow, which the Speaker considered to be of a private nature, and contrary to the regulations of the house, the business ended in an adjournment.

The utility of an opposition in politics cannot reasonably be denied, but the motives from which it should proceed, and the spirit in which it ought to be conducted, so as to deserve commendation, will rarely be found illustrated in the parliamentary history of this country during the present long and eventful reign. For the most part it has been a union of one set of men under a leader of eminence and influence, having no other object than that of completing the ruin of a resignation by continually embarrassing his measures. That the unanimity with which Mr. Pitt was assailed throughout the whole of his public acts arose solely from the desire of shaking his credit in the house and the nation appeared evident in the zeal to justify personal hostility by the pretext of detecting continually errors in the government.

CHAPTER XIV.

Character of the Opposition.—Anecdotes of Mr. Courtenay.—Ordnance Estimates.—Dispute with Bearcroft on the Law of Evidence.—Prosecution of Stockdale for a Libel.—Comparative View of the two India Bills.—Notice of that Pamphlet in the House.—Opposition to the licensing of Sadler's Wells.—Observations on Theatrical Monopoly.—Debates on Financial Subjects.—Cause of Sheridan's personal Enmity to Pitt.

THE utility of an opposition in politics cannot reasonably be denied, but the motives from which it should proceed, and the spirit in which it ought to be conducted, so as to deserve commendation, will rarely be found illustrated in the parliamentary history of this country during the present long and eventful reign. For the most part, it has been a union of one set of men under a leader of eminence and influence, having no other object than that of compelling the minister to a resignation by continually embarrassing his measures. That the uniformity with which Mr. Pitt was assailed throughout the whole of his public acts arose solely from this desire of shaking his credit in the house and the nation, appeared evident in the zeal to justify personal hostility, by the pretext of detecting continually errors in the government.

In this field, like that of controversy in general, victory, and not truth, has been the aim of the combatants, who have become more ardent in proportion to the poverty of their cause and the fallacy of their reasoning. It certainly is very extraordinary, that men of talent should deceive themselves into a persuasion that they are actuated by public principles in obstinately attacking every proposition of a minister merely as such, and either without any examination at all, or if they take the trouble of considering the subject, only for the purpose of starting plausible objections against it. But there is another thing in this system of politics, still more difficult to reconcile to the rules of strict morality, and that is the entering into an association with parties on the score of private friendship, and to oblige particular persons. At the period of which we are treating, the strength of the opposition lay in this combination of members who were attached to Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan, on account of their urbanity and gaiety. Among others might be mentioned the late Mr. John Courtenay, who had filled the situation of Surveyor-General of the Ordnance with great credit, under Lord Townshend, but who declined continuing in that office when the Duke of Richmond became master-general, though strongly urged to retain it by most of his friends. Mr. Courtenay was a man of wit and ability, correct in his conduct, and assiduous when in

business. His circumstances were very contracted, and his family was large; yet though he might have held his place without any condition, and even continued in parliament on the same independent footing, he chose to retire from the board, to his very great inconvenience, that he might be at liberty to act and speak more freely under the banners of the party with whom he was allied. In answer to one of his most intimate acquaintance, who remonstrated with him on the romantic impolicy of his conduct, he says: "I have long hated the business and attendance in parliament, especially in my dependent state; and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to get out of it. My sentiments, on taking a part with administration, I have already given you. I could not reconcile it to myself. I should feel dishonoured and disgraced, and my vote one day in the house would make me shoot myself the next. Mr. Fox has always treated me with great kindness, and has laid me under obligations which I shall never forget; and I both love and admire my friend Sheridan." Thus, while a man takes a pride in being independent of the government, he has no scruple of shackling himself in the bonds of a party, and would rather injure his family than keep his mind in a state of freedom. This was the exact case of Mr. Courtenay, who owns as much in the same letter, by saying: "I would, as a duty incumbent on me,

do any thing to save my children, except dishonouring myself. I am perfectly persuaded that must soon be the case, as I have not either of the two modern or fashionable resources, to wit, a pack of cards or a dice-box. I have no share in a Pharo bank, or credit with any bank: at the same time I value a seat in parliament, as, though it does not give me office, it keeps me out of a very disagreeable office—the King's Bench.”

Such is the picture of a political partizan, who had sufficient spirit to refuse serving the country in a situation which required neither the sacrifice of principle, nor the prostitution of talents, while at the same time he wanted fortitude to shake off the servility of a connexion, which, by his own account, was more distinguished by genius than morality.

Well then might one of the steadiest and most considerate friends of Mr. Courtenay lament his rashness and condemn his folly in reply to the gentleman who imparted to him a copy of this letter. “You must be sensible,” he observed, “that nothing but the height of imprudence could have led Courtenay into any party; his line was clear and easy, to live with those he liked and loved; but to keep himself distinct from them in parliament, which he had it in his power to do without giving any of them offence. However, he has not followed this line: he has involved himself, I know not how far, and therefore am not

capable of saying precisely what he can do ; but from his nice and honourable feelings, I should suppose he is far involved with Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan. Although I think this wrong in himself, I should be very far from even wishing that he should attempt to get out of such a scrape, by any means which could dishonour him.—I admire the abilities of Mr. Fox as much as Courtenay does. I have no doubt but that such abilities and such connexions as he is possessed of must bring him into administration in the circle of events ; but the opportunity does not appear to be near ; and, in the mean time, what is to become of poor Courtenay if his feelings now forbid him to take the line which his situation demands ? Let him ask Mr. Fox his opinion upon the subject. I have such an idea of Mr. Fox's sense and manliness, that I verily believe he would, considering every thing, advise Courtenay to follow Lord Townshend ; or else he would devise some plan by which he was to be supported."

But Courtenay, instead of following this judicious counsel, continued to exert his caustic powers in opposition to Mr. Pitt on every occasion ; and as he was very little inferior to Sheridan in wit, but much his superior in the knowledge of accounts, and the details of public business, the latter cherished his intimacy, and profited by his abilities. It was chiefly from Courtenay that he obtained the information and arguments which

enabled him to attack the fortification plan of the Duke of Richmond: and soon after the commencement of the session, at the close of this year, Sheridan took an opportunity, with the same assistance, of bringing forward a series of motions relative to the conduct of the Board of Ordnance.

But though he succeeded in carrying all these, with the exception of one, which went to enquire into the expense incurred by the defence of the West India islands, no proceedings were adopted, in consequence of the information that had been obtained.

On the eleventh of February, 1788, a smart contest took place in the House of Commons, between Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan on the one side, and Counsellor Bearcroft on the other. The disputes arose out of the charges which were exhibited against Sir Elijah Impey, for the perversion of justice, and various acts of oppression, while presiding as chief of the court in Bengal. Mr. Farrer, a member of parliament, being examined in his place on his knowledge of these transactions, produced a paper purporting to be the account of a conversation held by the judges in the supreme court of judicature, in the presence of an attorney, who took it down in writing at the time, but who was then in India. Nothing could be more ridiculous than the admission of such an unauthorised and flimsy statement upon charges of the most serious import; and yet the admission of

this paper was strenuously contended for by Mr. Fox, in opposition to the present lord chancellor and other lawyers of the first eminence, who had declared that the written account of a hearsay conversation should not be received by any court in the kingdom. Mr. Fox, on the contrary, maintained that the paper in question was a proper document to be laid upon the table, because the proceeding then under consideration had no analogy to the business of the courts in Westminster Hall: and he farther asserted, more boldly than might have been expected from so zealous a defender of the rights of the people, that the House of Commons in its judicial capacity was in no case bound by the rules of legal evidence. Not content with advancing this dangerous doctrine, which, if acted upon as an established principle, would convert the palladium of our liberties into an engine of arbitrary terror, more tremendous than the star chamber of old, he proceeded to treat the law members with undeserved asperity for coming down in a body to allege rules of enquiry where the same could not apply. Now these very rules, which Mr. Fox reprobated so strongly, were those which he, of all public and independent men, ought to have valued most highly, because they form the strongest shield for the protection of the meanest subject in the realm from the influence of power and the ingenuity of prejudice. The case of Algernon Sydney ought to have taught

this great statesman a lesson of caution against broaching, for a particular purpose, an argument upon the validity of unaccredited papers as testimony in support of a charge of great magnitude.

The inconsistency of Mr. Fox upon this occasion was not more apparent than his intemperance; for while he was endeavouring to give the House of Commons a new power in the construction of evidence, he reminded the gentlemen of the bar that there was a period when the judges of the land were subject to impeachment, for a misconstruction of the law of the land. It was, therefore, very natural that so offensive an attack should be felt with indignation by the persons upon whom it was made; and accordingly Mr. Bearcroft, a barrister of the first eminence, in reply to Mr. Fox, began by observing that he could not avoid expressing his astonishment at the illiberal obloquy with which the right honourable gentleman opposite to him had treated the whole profession. He added, that if he was to lay his finger upon the particular point which had elevated the practice of law in this country, so high in the estimation of all the world, it would be upon the law of evidence. Bearcroft then, in allusion to the boast of Mr. Fox that he had been bred in that house, sarcastically observed, that if his late speech was to be taken as a proof of that breeding, he desired to witness no more of it. He next entered into a justification of his brethren, from the charge

of being actuated, on the present occasion, by the *esprit du corps*! “Was it,” he said, “to be wondered at, that lawyers should be anxious to attend the charge against a lawyer of long standing and unsullied character; and that charge as black an one as ever was imputed to any man, or even any lawyer?”

All this was perfectly reasonable, but the singular expression with which the speech concluded afforded such an apt opportunity for the sportive humour of Sheridan, that he immediately rose, and observed, that “the honourable and learned gentleman was desirous of not only teaching that house the law, but breeding, and he wished still further, to instruct them in French. He could not but admire the comical sort of argument which the honourable and learned gentleman had used in justification of his profession. He had said every thing handsome of his brethren, and perfected his encomium by the whimsical addition, that the charge against Sir Elijah Impey was as black as could be brought against any man: nay, against any lawyer.” Mr. Sheridan, however, was not satisfied with the display of his wit, in which he had generally as much success as the matter was worth, but he must venture also upon an explanatory defence of the positions advanced by his right honourable friend. In contending for the admission of the paper, he defined good evidence to be that which is applicable to the end for

which it is employed, and which the court before whom it is exhibited has full authority to receive. Different courts, he observed, have different powers; and what would be evidence in one would not be so in another: thus, what is evidence in the Court of Chancery would not be evidence in that of the King's Bench; nor would that testimony which was good evidence on a trial for felony be allowed on a trial for high treason. Such was the method of reasoning adopted to strengthen the arguments of Mr. Fox; but it required a very slender knowledge of the general principles of equity, or of the particular practice of our own courts, to see the fallacy of a position which would place justice under the controul of the passions, by giving to the managers of public prosecutions the right of adducing any thing as evidence which, according to their construction put upon it, might be made to weigh against the accused party. What Mr. Sheridan observed with regard to the difference of evidence in the courts had nothing to do in the case; for though there may be a variety in practice, the principle is substantially the same, and no written information could be received in any of them, unsanctioned by the solemnity of an oath. Considering the nature of impeachments, the political enmity out of which they too frequently arise, the spirit with which they are conducted, and the immense advantages possessed by the managers of them

over the accused, there is the greater necessity for restraining the proceedings within the limits of judicial precedent. An instance in illustration of this occurred at the trial of Dr. Sacheverel, when the Lords overruled the decided and uniform opinion of the judges on a point of practice, by declaring, that, "in prosecutions by impeachments for high crimes and misdemeanours, by writing or speaking, the particular words supposed to be criminal are not necessary to be expressly specified in such impeachments."

Were this decision to be adopted as law, no man could well escape conviction, because he would be unable to frame a defence against charges not explicitly stated, but left to be modified at the discretion of his accusers, and to be interpreted according to the sense in which they may choose to represent, or the judges be disposed to understand them. The doctrine advanced by Mr. Fox, and defended by Mr. Sheridan, on the present occasion, was of a piece with the decision of the Lords in opposition to the highest legal authorities of the realm, from which it may be seen with what a rigid jealousy motions for impeachments should be watched, and how strictly every encroachment upon the ordinary rules of legal inquiry should be resisted.

But this was not the only occasion on which Mr. Fox and his friends departed from the broad principles of liberty which they professed, and by

which it was their boast to be distinguished; for when some able writer, well acquainted with the history of India, and no less informed upon the character and conduct of parties at home, published "A Review of the principal Charges against Warren Hastings," in which the merits of that gentleman were set forth in a very clear light, while the motives of his enemies were as plainly depicted, Mr. Fox moved an address to his Majesty, praying that the attorney-general might be ordered to prosecute the publisher. Mr. Sheridan supported this motion; and, in doing so, he threw out some very strange remarks, the worst of which was one respecting the favour in which Mr. Hastings was at that time supposed to be held by the sovereign. Such was the liberality and the zeal of these advocates for the freedom of the press: but, to their mortification, the jury who tried the cause evinced, by a verdict of not guilty, a far greater regard for the right of private opinion and public discussion than those persons who clamoured loudest for a privilege which they were among the most forward to check when it was exercised in opposition to themselves.

At the beginning of this year Mr. Sheridan drew up and printed a quarto pamphlet with this title: "A comparative Statement of the Two Bills for the better Government of the British Possessions in India, brought into Parliament by Mr. Fox and Mr. Pitt, with explanatory Observations." His

alleged motive for this publication was to clear the celebrated measure of his friend from the misrepresentations with which it had been treated, and to shew its superiority for every effective and beneficial purpose over that of the minister. But considering the time that had elapsed since the rejection of the one and the adoption of the other, it is evident that the Comparative Statement must have had some immediate cause for its appearance at this period. The fact is, that Mr. Sheridan availed himself of one of those occurrences which will sometimes happen in all states, when the exigence of the case must plead for the departure from a general rule, or even in violation of an express statute. In the preceding year serious apprehensions having been formed of a rupture with France, it was deemed adviseable to send out four regiments to India, on board the ships belonging to the company, which proposition met with the approbation of the court of directors. Afterwards, when the alarm had subsided, a question arose between the government and the court in regard to the expense of sending out these forces, and of their future payment. By an act passed in 1781, it was settled that the company should be bound to pay for such troops only as were sent out at their requisition; and therefore, sheltering themselves under this act, the directors refused to take the burthen of the present expense upon themselves. The Board of Controul on the other hand asserted a

right to assess the charge upon the revenues of the company. This right, however, being questioned by the lawyers to whom it was referred, Mr. Pitt was compelled to bring in a declaratory bill to remove the existing doubts, and to establish the power contended for in the Board of Controul, by the express authority of parliament. So fair an opportunity of attacking the system which originated with him in opposition to that of Mr. Fox, could not well be suffered to pass without the keen animadversions of the party: and accordingly the respective merits of the two bills for the regulation of the government of India were again agitated, as usual, with argument, wit, and invective. In these debates Mr. Sheridan shone with his wonted powers of keen and impassioned eloquence, now assailing the Board of Controul, then rising to personal conflict with the minister, and concluding with predicting the ruin of the company by its being placed in the hands of Mr. Dundas, designated by him as a quack doctor, whose sovereign remedy would no doubt soon be advertised under the popular name of "Scotch Pills for all sorts of Oriental Disorders." Besides adverting in a tone of triumph to the excellence of the measure which had been brought forward by his right honourable friend, and contrasting it with the multifarious system established under the direction of the Board of Controul, Mr. Sheridan, in order to make a strong impression upon the public

mind, sent his Comparative Statement to the press, of which he contrived to read an abstract in the course of his speech on the third reading of the declaratory bill.

But he was more successful at this time in resisting an application made to parliament by the proprietors of Sadler's Wells, than in his opposition to the minister upon the affairs of the East India Company. This place of amusement had been recently purchased at a great expense by Messrs. Wroughton and Arnold, who, being naturally very much alarmed by the fate of the Royalty Theatre, and the unceasing persecution carried on against that place of entertainment and its supporters, thought of obtaining an act enabling his Majesty to license their own performances. But upon the first reading of this bill, Mr. Sheridan delivered a long speech against it as being a monopoly, and likely to be injurious to the winter theatres. After representing in very harsh terms the Royalty Theatre, as a scheme set up on false pretences, and supported by a conspiracy of justices of the peace, Mr. Sheridan spoke more civilly of the application before the house; though under that cover of respect lay concealed the most inveterate hostility to every thing that wore an appearance of encroachment upon the monopoly in which he was himself engaged.

In this speech he feigned to have little individual interest in opposing the application, and to be

actuated solely by a concern for the rights of those whom he termed legal monopolists. He said that he knew little at that time of what was going on in the theatres, having long since entrusted his interest in them to the management and care of others, in whom he had reason to place confidence. After affecting much candour towards the proprietors of Sadler's Wells, coupled with some general expressions of tenderness for the rest of the minor places of amusement, Mr. Sheridan reprobated the application altogether, as an insidious proceeding to gain what would be equivalent to a patent, concluding with a motion to get rid of the bill by postponing the second reading, which was carried by a majority of nine.

This was not the only attempt made to put theatrical amusements more completely under parliamentary regulation, but without effect, owing to the stand set up against such an interference by Mr. Sheridan ; for during the same session, a bill passed the lower house to amend the acts in being respecting the licensing of places for dramatic performances ; but this bill, having undergone some alterations by the Lords, was sent back to the Commons, and there it was lost by a motion to put off the consideration to that day three months. The argument on this occasion was to the same effect as in the former case, the bill, as Mr. Sheridan said, tending to affect private property, and to destroy security that had been established for more than a century, on the sanction of parliamentary faith.

It was certainly fair that Mr. Sheridan should strain every nerve to prevent any abridgment of that concern in which he had so great an interest; but the attempt to justify the principle of monopoly in the case of public amusements, and that too by giving to grants made in the reign of the second Charles an obligation of restraint upon parliaments in modern times, when the metropolis is more than doubled in population, must be considered as equally preposterous and selfish.

In his speech on the Interlude Bill, Mr. Sheridan asked, with an air of confidence, whether if a bill was introduced from motives of private pique and personal resentment, to take away the grant of one shilling upon every chaldron of coals brought into the port of London, for the benefit of the Duke of Richmond, such a proposition would not be rejected as a glaring act of injustice?

In whatever light this argument might appear at the time, a more unfortunate one could hardly have been adopted, because it went to support one preposterous and arbitrary grant by the authority of another, that derived its source from the same corrupt period. Theatrical monopoly could no more be justified by the patent right vested in some of the descendants of Charles the Second than this impost itself could be defended in opposition to the general interests of the country. So far from acting unjustly in abolishing either one or both, parliament would be guilty of a dereliction of duty in perpetuating such grants con-

trary to the public good, and the altered state of society. When the reason which gave birth to any exclusive privilege ceases to exist, and a change of circumstances calls for alteration, the legislature is bound to consult the general interest of the community, with as tender a regard as possible to the necessary sacrifice of individual profit. Every monopoly, therefore, should, in the nature of things, be of limited duration, and its advantages proportionate to the immediate art, labour, and expense, requisite for the purpose of rendering it serviceable to the public, as well as conducive to the private emolument of the persons concerned in the undertaking. But however expedient it may be to encourage scientific inventions and useful speculations, it seems repugnant to common sense to establish a monopoly of public amusement, and to confine in an immense capital the higher order of dramatic performances to one or two places only, leaving the minor institutions at liberty to vitiate the national taste and manners by the exhibition of buffoonery. If the stage be indeed that school of moral instruction which it has been represented, its excellence in this respect must arise from the nature of the entertainment which it affords: the natural inference, therefore, will be, that instead of restraining the small theatres from performing regular plays, they should be encouraged to exhibit nothing else. Considering the narrow scope afforded for the

exercise of genius in dramatic composition, owing to the maintenance of a system which is too contracted for the state of population, and too cumbersome to be particularly useful, it ought not to excite surprise that this branch of poesy should have rapidly declined, while every other department of literature has been extended and improved.

In this session of parliament Mr. Sheridan continued to arraign the financial measures of Mr. Pitt, with his accustomed vehemence of assertion and acrimony of language; but though he endeavoured to make it appear that the revenue and resources of this country were in as low and perplexed a condition as those of France, he failed in making any impression upon the house or the public. His renewed objections to the Commutation Act, as a remedy against the smuggling of tea, drew a short reply from the minister, who complained of the eager disposition which his adversary manifested to quarrel with him upon all occasions, and that for no other purpose, as it evidently appeared, than to obtrude his own dreams and reveries as demonstrative truths. This remark stung Sheridan so completely to the quick, that he immediately pledged himself to bring the act in question under public examination, to prove what he had stated respecting its supposed failure; but though he was afterwards repeatedly challenged to fulfil his promise, the matter ended without any inquiry.

It would be somewhat difficult to ascertain the cause of the personal hostility which marked the conduct of Mr. Sheridan whenever he entered upon the discussion of financial subjects, and such as seemed to afford little or no occasion for sarcastic wit and intemperate language. Probably, the cheap rate at which Mr. Pitt estimated the talents of his opponent, when employed upon questions which required practical knowledge, and the exercise of great diligence to comprehend them fully, might have the effect of creating an occasional acerbity, which was very far from being the natural temperament of Sheridan, who was not only frequently discomposed by the convincing arguments of the minister, but hurt at the firmness of his language and the dignity of his demeanour. On some occasions, the sharpness of controversy descended to the virulence of coarse invective, an instance of which happened in this session upon the agitation of a question relative to the government of Canada, where great disquietude had been excited by the rumour of an intention to introduce the whole system of English jurisprudence. Petitions against such an innovation were transmitted to parliament; and, upon the discussion of the subject in a committee, Mr. Sheridan hazarded the bold assertion that Lord Dorchester, the governor of Canada, had declined giving any information or opinion upon the state of the province, with regard to the question of its judicial administration. In reply

to this declaration, Mr. Pitt merely observed, that he not only had reason to expect, but that he anticipated considerable information from Lord Dorchester; upon which Sheridan exclaimed—“Will the right honourable gentleman produce his lordship’s dispatches to prove the fact? I dare him to the proof.”

To this defiance, which called upon the minister for the evidence of his veracity, when in reason it was the duty of Sheridan to have adduced his authority for what he had previously advanced, Mr. Pitt contented himself with saying, “that the honourable gentleman had introduced a new species of argument in that house, and that if it prevailed, it would only be in future for any confident man to come forward boldly with a direct assertion, and, on receiving a positive denial, to challenge the production of papers as the test of verity.”

Nothing could be more clear and convincing than this view of the proceeding; but Mr. Sheridan, after pausing a moment, answered, “that he was satisfied the right honourable gentleman did not mean to use the word CONFIDENT in the sense in which it at first struck him that he did, because he was assured that the sort of confidence which he approved was a confidence of fine promises and professions, where no reason was assigned nor any performance intended; and not a confidence, in matter of fact, capable of proof, and desirous of meeting it.” Mr. Sheridan next vin-

dictated the course pursued by him, and contended, that nothing could be more fair, after he had asserted what he had good authority to believe, than to call upon the right honourable gentleman to produce those parts of Lord Dorchester's dispatches which stated that no farther information could be expected from him on the nature of the government best adapted for Canada. Having thus offered an apology for the challenge which he had thrown out, he concluded with saying, "that it peculiarly became a person of such notorious modesty and diffidence as the right honourable gentleman to charge him with confidence and presumption, in daring to abide by his assertion relative to a matter of fact which could not be disproved."

But this mode of justification was weak in the extreme; for as Sheridan had advanced what he called a positive fact himself, which the other as flatly denied, it became necessary to have the proof of the primary assertion attested by him who made it, before the minister could lie under any obligation to shew why he called the truth of it in question.

Of such flights of eloquence as those which terminated this dispute, totally void as they were of reason, and poignant only in abuse, the most favourable judgment that can be formed is, that they were the vituperations of a mortified mind, fertile in objections, and exasperated by defeat.

CHAPTER XV.

Trial of Mr. Hastings.—Eloquence and Violence of Mr. Burke.—Strange Proposition of the Managers.—Debate thereon by the Lords.—Speech of Mr. Fox.—His Opinion of the Law and Usage of Parliament.—Mode of examining Witnesses.—Altercation between Mr. Sheridan and Major Scott.—Spirited Conduct of Sir Elijah Impey.—Motion to inquire into the Expenses of the Proceedings.—Speech of Mr. Sheridan on the Begum Charge.—Extravagant Eulogium by Mr. Burke.—Commemoration of the Revolution.

ON the thirteenth of February, the trial of Mr. Hastings commenced in Westminster Hall, which was crowded to an unexampled degree, owing to the peculiarity of the charges, and the splendid combination of talents engaged to conduct the prosecution. Two days were taken up in reading the articles of impeachment, with the answers thereto; and four more were occupied by Mr. Burke in opening the case and stating the grounds of the accusation. Never were the powers of that wonderful man displayed to such advantage as on this occasion, and he astonished even those who were most intimately acquainted with him by the vast extent of his reading, the variety of his resources, the minuteness of his information, and

the lucid order in which he arranged the whole for the support of his object, and to make a deep impression upon the minds of his hearers. The description which he drew of the ancient and modern state of Hindostan was sketched with a masterly hand, and wrought up in a manner that could not fail to fix the attention and to command admiration. Nor was the historical view which he gave of that country, and the detailed account of its revolutions, less calculated to enlighten the assembly, and to elucidate the particular facts and representations which were brought under investigation. The origin and progress of the chartered company trading to the east were also traced with precision and accuracy, for the purpose of defining the constitution of that great commercial body, and to make it appear how far the powers exercised under its authority had been so violated as to call for the present judicial inquiry. Having thus cleared his way to the important cause in which he took the lead, Mr. Burke proceeded at great length into the history of Bengal, under the government of Mr. Hastings, to whom he applied epithets which at any time would be indecorous, but which in that stage of the business were unbecoming the dignity of the assembly, still more unworthy of the speaker, and, what was far worse, extremely cruel to the person accused.

Though it would be uncandid to suppose that the honourable manager was not himself convinced

of the truth of what he asserted, yet, as he had no positive certainty of it, his confidence ought to have been tempered with moderation, especially as the ends of justice could not be answered by inflaming the public mind against the defendant, upon subjects and transactions of which few persons had any clear preceptions, and concerning the alleged criminality of which fewer could form any correct judgment. Of the violence of Mr. Burke, and his eagerness to render the object of his attack universally odious, a more satisfactory proof need hardly be given than the manner and language with which he concluded, by saying of Mr. Hastings: "I impeach him in the
" name of the Commons of Great Britain in
" Parliament assembled, whose parliamentary trust
" he has betrayed.

" I impeach him in the name of all the Commons
" of Great Britain, whose national character he
" has dishonoured.

" I impeach him in the name of the people of
" India, whose laws, rights, and liberties he has
" subverted, whose properties he has destroyed,
" whose country he has laid waste and desolated.

" I impeach him in the name of human nature
" itself, which he has so cruelly outraged, injured,
" and oppressed in both sexes, in every age, rank,
" situation, and condition of life."

The agitation produced by this speech was such that the whole audience appeared to have felt one

convulsive emotion, and when it was over, some time elapsed before Mr. Fox could obtain a hearing, while he submitted on the part of the committee their intention to come to a conclusion on both sides upon each article separately; or to adduce evidence to substantiate one charge at a time, to hear the prisoner's defence and evidence upon it, and afterwards to reply; and to proceed in the same manner with all the other heads of accusation. When the chancellor called upon the counsel for Mr. Hastings to say whether this mode was agreeable to them, and was answered in the negative, his lordship desired to know the reasons on which the managers wished to adopt the course they had suggested. Mr. Fox replied that in a case of such magnitude, variety, and complexity, it was absolutely necessary, and was calculated to prevent confusion and obscurity, to aid the memory of the lords, and to enable them to form a more clear and distinct view of the merits of the charge and defence upon each article, than could be done by any other mode of proceeding. Mr. Fox concluded with adducing the cases of the Earls of Strafford and Macclesfield, as precedents in support of this claim on the part of the managers.

The counsel, on the other side, contended that the mode now proposed was contrary to the practice of all courts of justice, and inconsistent with every principle of equity, as it subjected the defendant to numerous disadvantages. Mr. Fox

replied, by a recapitulation of the reasons already assigned; and the lords withdrew to their own house for the purpose of taking the matter into consideration. In the debate which took place upon this question great legal knowledge was displayed, particularly by the chancellor, who, after paying a fine compliment to the eloquence of Mr. Burke, and remarking the shock which the auditors had experienced from the pathetic and harrowing description which he had given of Indian sufferings, forcibly reminded the house of the necessity of being guarded against impressions made upon their feelings. While he admitted, that if the charges were proved, no punishment could be adequate to the enormity of the crimes, yet justice demanded that the most equitable methods should be pursued to ascertain the guilt, or to clear the innocence of Mr. Hastings. His lordship maintained, that what the counsel claimed was no indulgence, but an absolute right, for nothing could be more fair than the line of proceeding which they required, as the articles were so intimately blended that it was impossible for human ingenuity to separate them. They comprised the whole of Mr. Hastings' government for a long series of years; and the merits and demerits of particular parts might possibly materially depend upon the various relations which they bore to each other. The chancellor concluded with saying, that as he was bound in con-

science to protect Mr. Hastings, if innocent, or to punish him severely, if guilty, he never could consent to a mode of procedure unfair to the defendant in the highest degree, and contrary to the fundamental principles of justice. Lord Loughborough replied to the chancellor; but he was obliged so far to yield to the principle of law laid down by him, as to contend that parliaments were not bound by the rules of the courts below, having a right to consult their own convenience in the administration of justice. Thus it was admitted that the proposal of the managers was an extreme case, and one, that to suit their purpose, must be governed by expedience. The chancellor, however, with his wonted firmness, combated the preposterous doctrine which had been laid down, and maintained, in opposition to it, that "it is the duty of a judge to do justice, without any regard to his own convenience, and to administer that justice according to the laws of England."

With respect to the law and usage of parliament, concerning which so much had been said, the chancellor disclaimed all knowledge of any such system. He denied its very existence, though in barbarous times the subterfuge or fiction had been resorted to in order to cover and justify the most iniquitous and atrocious acts. But in these enlightened days he hoped that no man would be tried in any other way than by the established law

of the land, which was admirably calculated to protect innocence and to punish guilt. These irrefragable arguments prevailed; and though a division took place, the proposition of the managers was rejected by a majority of near three to one.

When this determination of the Lords was announced in Westminster Hall, Mr. Fox, on the part of the Committee, asserted the right of the Commons to bring up new articles of impeachment at any time, even while the prisoner should be upon his defence; and that such articles should form part of the original prosecution.

Having hazarded this tyrannical principle, which better became the court of inquisition than the representatives of a free people, Mr. Fox paused for a reply, but none being given, he proceeded to justify trials by impeachment, which he considered as a distinguishing feature of the British constitution, and he also vindicated the law and usage of parliament as one of the most important branches of the law of the land. The independent spirit of Mr. Fox broke forth with great fervour upon this occasion; but unfortunately the ground which he had to maintain was untenable, without giving to parliamentary prosecutions indefinable powers and the unlimited exercise of vengeance. Of the impeachment the managers were then upon, it was observed by this eminent man, that "it neither originated in the violence of power, sudden resentment, nor party interests; but that it was the

result of many years deliberation, and was brought forward by persons weak in point of influence and authority, with whom were united parties of opposite sentiments in politics, who had, however, laid aside the contests for power, to support the cause of humanity."

Such were the positions advanced by Mr. Fox in the exordium to his celebrated speech on the Benares Charge; and they afford a striking instance of the imbecility of human wisdom when engaged in the attempt to apologise for the stretch of power by the rule of expedience, and to reconcile the abstract love of justice with the endeavour to set aside its established principles in particular cases.

Had the mode of procedure demanded by the managers been adopted, the impeachment would have split into as many trials as there were charges, and the difficulty of defence would have increased in a degree proportioned to the variety of objects, and their separation from each other. As the whole administration of Mr. Hastings was under review, the ends of substantial justice required that every article of accusation should be considered in connexion with the rest, for otherwise that which might have been essentially necessary and praiseworthy, as conducive to the welfare of an extensive government, would, in an insulated state, wear the appearance of wanton oppression and outrageous violence. It was easy to see that the intention of the conductors of this

prosecution was to embarrass the defence of Mr. Hastings as much as possible, and to avail themselves of the advantages derived from an influence over inflamed passions and agitated feelings, before that explication and evidence could be had, which would have either repelled the matter of accusation altogether, or have freed it from the misrepresentations of prejudice, and the impressions of ignorance. The event proved that the decision of the Lords was most judicious, for when the public mind became cool, and when eloquence had lost its fascinating power, as truth forced its way through the mists of deception and exaggeration, the cause of Mr. Hastings began to be viewed in a different light, and even the ardour of Burke was unable to give additional interest or popularity to the prosecution.

In the contest with the counsel about the manner of conducting the impeachment, Mr. Sheridan does not appear to have borne any part; but his acuteness and address were conspicuous in the examination of the witnesses. The skill with which he put and varied his interrogatories would have done credit to the most experienced barrister; but in some instances it was manifest that he sought for opportunities of advantage from casual inadvertencies of expression, lapses of memory, and apparent contradictions. The arts indeed that were made use of throughout this most extraordinary trial, to ensnare witnesses into answers suited

to the objects of the managers, were among the most disgraceful features of the prosecution, and would hardly have been tolerated in those days, when impeachments were frequently instituted as a sacrifice to public vengeance, or to gratify private enmity. The nature of the present case peculiarly called for a liberal construction of evidence, a more than ordinary indulgence to the persons examined, and a scrupulous regard to accuracy, in recording and quoting their testimony. In a cause so complicated as this, where transactions were to be brought under the investigation of an assembly, little, if at all, accustomed to the minute circumstances necessarily connected with the subject before them, there must have been unavoidably considerable misapprehension on the part of the hearers, and confusion in the witnesses. The relation of particulars incapable of being familiarized to mere English ideas and customs, required therefore the exercise of great patience and concession in those who had to decide upon an accusation of such a complicated description, with an equal portion of calmness and condescension in those who were appointed to conduct the prosecution. It is, however, to be lamented that so obvious a principle which should pervade all judicial inquiries, and public prosecutions beyond every other, is scarcely to be traced in the history of this unexampled impeachment. Mr. Sheridan shewed his dexterity in putting leading questions to witnesses,

for the purpose of eliciting from them such acknowledgments and declarations as would have inferred not only criminality on their part, but also of the superior guilt of Mr. Hastings. This ingenuity had the effect of embarrassing some who were naturally diffident, or who had reasons to be cautious; and in the cases of others, it produced disputes and explanation. The principal exercise of Mr. Sheridan's powers was upon Mr. Middleton, who was the English resident in Oude at the period when those transactions took place which were alleged against Mr. Hastings as highly criminal. The perplexity of this witness was such, that he could say nothing with any certainty upon circumstances in which he had a principal concern, or of documents which had officially been executed under his directions. His recollection, indeed, was so defective as to throw an air of ridicule over the whole of his examination; and it increased every time that he appeared in court, so that the managers could gain nothing more from him than an admission of some facts, which, whatever might have been their culpability, it could not by any just inference be transferred to Mr. Hastings. That inference, however, was drawn, though the witness repeatedly assigned as the reason of his hesitation the danger into which he should be involved by a full explanation. The fair interpretation of this acknowledgment and trepidation would have been, that the witness felt more

for himself than for any other person; and that seeing, as he must, the eagerness of the prosecutors to strain every irregularity into crime, he was apprehensive of being called to account for what he had alone performed, and for which, of course, he only was responsible. But such a construction would have defeated the object of the impeachment; and, therefore, when nothing could be obtained from this gentleman to affect the character or conduct of Mr. Hastings, it was contrived to represent the forgetfulness and agitation of Mr. Middleton as corroborative of the truth of the charges. But if this witness had really been of so much importance, the legal advisers of Mr. Hastings would certainly have taken care to prepare him more for their purpose by proper instruction than they did. On the contrary, it appeared that they were very scrupulous in this respect, and took not the least pains in guarding his evidence; though the managers and their agent, Mr. Francis in particular, had frequent conferences with him, at which he was subjected to long examinations, and sometimes very roughly treated. This indifference to the testimony of Mr. Middleton on the one side, and an earnestness to assist the prosecution by it on the other, ought to have had great weight in favour of the defendant, instead of which, his perplexity was ascribed to art, and his want of recollection to a design of suppressing truth. Mr. Sheridan, upon whom the whole of this inves-

tigation devolved, was extremely severe in his remarks upon the answers of Mr. Middleton; and the nature of his observations tended only to increase that embarrassment and wavering, which, by a more temperate mode of proceeding, might have been in a great degree remedied. The leading counsel for the defence took an occasion in the course of this examination to recommend a more conciliatory course of inquiry to Mr. Sheridan, for, as he said, such comments made in the presence of the witness only tended to make him more confused; and therefore he requested that, for the sake of humanity, the honourable manager would wait till the witness should have withdrawn. Upon this very reasonable proposition, which was not more to the advantage of one side than the other, Mr. Sheridan observed, "that the managers were very far from being deficient in humanity; for if they had been, the manner in which the witness had given his evidence would have induced their complaint to the house, in which case he had no doubt but that their lordships would have inflicted a punishment adequate to the offence."

Yet, as it was well observed by Lord Stormont, in the course of this very examination, a man employed in an important negotiation might certainly, after the lapse of several years, forget many particulars which had occurred under his own immediate inspection, and with his concurrence, without being chargeable with any evil intention.

In regard to Mr. Middleton, it must be obvious to every dispassionate reader of these proceedings, that his anxiety and incertitude, hesitation and forgetfulness, arose rather from the dread of committing an error than the consciousness of any former turpitude. He seems, indeed, to have been more appalled with terror as he advanced, which may be easily accounted for from the circumstances of his situation, the tribunal before which he stood, the powers employed in sifting his memory, and the apprehension which he must have formed of being made himself an object of prosecution.

The examination of Major Scott afforded a very striking contrast to that of the preceding witness, for he manifested no reluctance to answer any questions; and on every point of which he had a personal knowledge or correct information, he was at once communicative and explicit, both with regard to facts and dates. Where so much candour prevailed, some confidence might naturally have been expected; but even here, that which a liberal judgment would have received with an indulgence for any apparent inadvertencies and inaccuracies was converted into matter of suspicion. Major Scott, in an examination before a select committee of the House of Commons, had said of the presents received by Mr. Hastings, that they were not only fairly appropriated for the public benefit, but with the entire sanction of

the directors, to whom an early communication was made on the subject. It appeared, however, that this communication was somewhat delayed by unavoidable circumstances; and upon this slender discrepancy, and others as trifling, Mr. Sheridan ventured to charge the witness with prevarication, observing that his answers at the trial differed from those before given by him; and therefore that if he was to believe the one, he could not believe a word of the other. To this the Major replied, by wishing that his evidence before the Commons might be read, when it would appear, he said, that he had been uniform and consistent in all the evidence he had given on both occasions. He had nothing to conceal at either time: he meant to speak out: he did not want to shelter himself under the pretence of a short memory, or the distance of periods in which the transactions under inquiry took place: and that if he had said any thing that was not fairly stated, he should be very glad of an opportunity to correct it.

In a subsequent stage of the trial, during the same session, Major Scott applied for permission to correct a misrepresentation that had crept into the minutes of his evidence; upon which Mr. Sheridan asked him when he first discovered the mistake in his evidence which he wished to correct? The other answered with becoming spirit that he had no wish to correct any mistake, for he had made none; but that one question put to

him might be made to bear two constructions, one which he intended, and another which he did not. This was the case in the present instance, and therefore he wished that his answer might be inserted correspondent with the fact, and his original expressions. He did not wish to alter one word of any evidence that he had actually given. Upon this some altercation took place between Mr. Sheridan and the Major, the former asserting that there was a contradiction between his evidence and the fact relative to the first information given by Mr. Hastings of the presents received from Cheit Sing. The lord chancellor here interposed, by requesting the Major to reconcile the apparent contradiction; to whom the witness replied, that even without having the minutes before him, he would boldly say there was not the slightest contradiction between his evidence and the fact; but that Mr. Sheridan, by introducing the word BOARD in his speech, which was not in the evidence, had attempted to fix upon him the charge of contradiction; but that he was confident if their lordships would have the goodness to turn to the evidence he had the honour to give when last before them they would find it perfectly correct.

The perspicuity and firmness of this gentleman made a deep impression upon the august assembly; and the contrivance that had been adopted to lessen the validity of his testimony served only to confirm its authority.

This was not the only instance of a spirited resist-

ance to the arbitrary conduct of the managers ; for Sir Elijah Impey, even while his own case was pending in the House of Commons, and he had no other expectation than that of being put upon his trial in a similar manner, would not tamely submit to the reflections thrown out upon his credibility as a witness. To some attempts of this kind, which were made in the course of his examination, he replied with the dignity becoming his professional rank, and the consciousness of his integrity ; and after repelling the observations of the managers, he addressed himself to the court in these words : “ My Lords, I trust it is understood that I stand here as a voluntary witness. In my testimony I am upon my oath ; I speak to the best of my recollection ; and I have a character to support. That character the honourable managers shall not take away, even by insinuation ; and I trust when I use this language your lordships will support me. I might hesitate to answer ; but such hesitation I disdain. I will speak freely and fairly ; but I will not have words *put into my mouth* which I have not uttered. No man shall *insinuate* that I am guilty of speaking falsely till he can prove that I have done so.” To this manly and energetic declaration the Lords nodded an assent of approbation, and Sir Elijah proceeded without reserve to give his evidence in a plain and simple style, which evinced that there was no wish to withhold information or to disguise the truth.

The witness narrated the particulars of his journey into the interior, for the purpose of visiting the country courts of justice, in the course of which he was called by the express desire of the governor-general to assist him at Benares, where a revolution had occurred. In this examination it appeared that Sir Elijah took a circuitous route when he left Patna to join Mr. Hastings; and he frankly observed that he was induced so to do from an inclination of seeing part of a country which he should never again have an opportunity of viewing. He also acknowledged, that during his residence at Benares, he had acted both as secretary to the governor-general, and also in his judicial capacity, by taking affidavits, though he was then beyond the bounds of his jurisdiction. But he justified his conduct by the peculiar circumstances of the case, and the authority of Lord Mansfield, who, on some emergent occasions, had exercised the judicial character where he had no local authority.

Mr. Sheridan, having endeavoured in the course of this examination to make it appear that the evidence of Sir Elijah Impey was a direct contradiction to some particulars contained in the defence of Mr. Hastings, was answered by the witness, that he gave his testimony without considering what effect it might have either on the charge or the defence, and that it was the duty of the court to make the application. Mr. Sheridan,

however, was not to be deterred by this pointed observation from making comments upon the evidence in the order of its progress ; and some of these being very severe upon the motives of Sir Elijah Impey in visiting Benares, the latter made this powerful appeal to the court : “ It has been objected to me as a crime, my lords, that I stepped out of my official line in the business of the affidavits ; and that I acted as the secretary of Mr. Hastings. I did do so. But I trust it is not in one solitary instance that I have done more than mere duty might require. The records of the East India Company, the minutes of the House of Commons, the recollection of various inhabitants of India, all—all, I trust, will prove that I never have been wanting to what I held was the service of my country. I have staid, when personal safety might have whispered, “ there is no occasion for your services.” I have gone forth—when individual ease might have said—“ stay at home.” I have advised, when I might coldly have denied my advice. But, I thank God, recollection does not raise a blush at the part I took ; and what I *then* did I am not *now* ashamed to mention.”

In consequence of the complaints made by some of the witnesses respecting the inaccurate manner in which their evidence was printed, Mr. Sheridan informed the court that the errors he had detected were so numerous, as to render it very inconvenient to correct them in open court. He there-

fore proposed that some of the managers and the counsel on the other side should meet out of court to examine the printed account, and state the errata, which should be afterwards shewn to the different witnesses, who might thereby be enabled to examine their evidence, and reduce it to the state in which it was delivered by them at the bar. This proposal met with the approbation of all parties.

During the early part of the trial, a motion was made in the House of Commons by Mr. Burgess, for an exact account of the money expended in the prosecution, specifying to whom, and on what account, the respective sums had been paid. This gave great offence to the leading managers, who complained of the motion as intended to impede the progress of justice, or, as Mr. Burke observed, to starve the cause. Sheridan made a humorous speech to the same effect, in which, among other remarks, he said, that the services already performed were ordered by the committee of managers under the authority of that house; so that if the house chose, they might resolve that no counsel should in future be allowed for the prosecution. If so, it would be necessary to move that the attorney and solicitor-general, together with the master of the rolls, be added to the committee; or, if the house thought proper, it might be resolved that the managers should pay the expenses of counsel themselves; in which

case the house would have the goodness to add Sir Samson Gideon, and some others of the most wealthy members, to the committee.

The motion, however, met with the approbation of the ministerial side of the house, and was carried, though no measures were adopted in consequence of it when the accounts were brought forward, which drew from Mr. Sheridan severe reflections upon the honourable mover for neglecting to act upon the doubts which he had expressed as to the propriety of some of the allowances.

It was generally considered as very extraordinary, that while the committee possessed three members who were of great legal eminence, it should have been found necessary to call to their assistance no less than four other barristers and two civilians. This formidable host, in addition to the combined talents of the managers, gave an immense advantage to the prosecution, and the greater as the defence was conducted by three counsel only, who had not only to contend with an accumulation of professional strength, but to hear with patience, and to endure in silence, language which no circumstances could excuse nor privileges justify.

The similarity of this impeachment to that of the Earl of Strafford has already been noticed; but it would scarcely seem credible that any man of common sense and liberality would have exulted in the parallel. Yet at the very opening of the

second, or Begum charge, this comparison was made a matter of boast by the manager who took the lead in that business, and who certainly exhibited in his behaviour that day a very faithful copy of the most furious and sanguinary of Strafford's enemies. This learned and honourable member of the committee having roundly maintained that Mr. Hastings had been guilty of falsifying dates in his narrative, the defendant felt a sudden impulse of resentment, which he vented only in a low whisper, by saying to a friend that the assertion was untrue. Pardonable as this emotion was, and warranted as Mr. Hastings would have been perhaps in a warmer expression of it, the manager, instead of passing it over, threw himself into a most violent outrage, and, in language perfectly ludicrous, claimed the protection of the court. Not content, however, with this boisterous appeal to the lords from the ruffling breeze of the prisoner, the manager ran on foaming with rage like a cataract, and partly in barbarous Latin, and partly in scurrilous English, he abused Mr. Hastings as a being sunk beneath humanity, to whom, without any hesitation, he imputed the crimes of forgery and murder. After this brutal insult, which could only disgrace the quarter from whence it issued, the same honourable member, emulous of the fame acquired by the zealous covenanters in the days of the unhappy Charles, compared Mr. Hastings to Strafford, and himself to Pym, whom he scrupled

not to call one of the greatest men this nation ever had to boast.

A more unlucky allusion could hardly have been made for the credit of the party engaged in this impeachment; because such was the justice of Pym and his faction, that when they had failed in proving their charges of treason against Strafford, they made him guilty by an especial act of their own, which the Lords were compelled by the most outrageous violence to pass, contrary to their own privileges and declared resolutions.

On the third of June, Mr. Sheridan entered upon the great task assigned him in this cause, of summing up the evidence on the second, or Begum charge. Public curiosity had never been so strongly excited since the commencement of this memorable trial than on this occasion; for by eight o'clock in the morning, the avenues leading to the court, through New and Old Palace Yard, were filled with persons of the first distinction, many of them peeresses in full dress, who stood in the open air for upwards of an hour and a half before the gates were opened; and the exertions that were made by the crowd to press eagerly forward for an early admittance, had nearly proved fatal to many persons.

The peers were not seated till twelve o'clock; soon after which the chancellor bowed to Mr. Sheridan, as a token that the Lords were then in readiness to hear him; upon which he rose imme-

diately, while all around him were as still as if the hall had been completely empty.

In his exordium he paid a handsome compliment to Mr. Burke, whom he characterised as the defender of the rights of men against man's oppression. After taking a general view of the prosecution, which he described as having no other motive than the honour of the country, and the happiness of those who live under its dominion, he observed that in so expanded a survey, Mr. Hastings, with all his greatness, was comparatively too insignificant to be mixed with such important considerations. "The unfortunate gentleman at the bar," said he, "is no mighty object in my mind. Amidst the series of mischiefs by which, to my sense, he appears surrounded, what is he but a petty nucleus involved in its lamina, scarcely seen, or deserving of a thought?"

Milton has used the same image, but to a much better purpose, and represented a comet as perplexing monarchs and appalling nations with superstitious fears: here, however, on the contrary, one of the sublimest spectacles in the universe is stripped of its grandeur to render the object with which it is set in comparison contemptible. This, it must be allowed, is a new figure in rhetoric, and one to which it would be difficult to give a name: but it might have been observed at the time, if poetical rhapsody was worth an argument, that by sinking Mr. Hastings thus low, his persecutors

brought themselves upon a level with him, and virtually admitted that their cause was not of the magnitude which they represented. But it was the height of absurdity to separate that gentleman from the fame which surrounded him; for let that have been glorious or otherwise, it was all his own; and this the honourable manager knew full well at the very moment when he was endeavouring to expose him to odium and contempt. Mr. Sheridan was not more felicitous in his apology for the agitators and conductors of the prosecution than he was in his similitude of a dark and empty comet. In describing his friends as persons actuated by no private motives or party spirit, his ingenuity or zeal certainly overstepped the bounds of probability; for there were very few, if any, in that assembly who could regard the impeachment as founded altogether upon public principles. It must, however, be mentioned to the credit of Mr. Sheridan, that notwithstanding some harsh expressions, and a constant disposition to strain every thing into a proof of guilt, he deported himself personally towards Mr. Hastings with much more liberal feeling and civility of language than the generality of his colleagues. Sheridan was not less flowing and pathetic than any of them; but he avoided their vehemence, and he descended not into that coarseness of invective which rendered the speeches of some of the other managers so disgusting as to destroy the effect which their arguments had at

first produced. By thus governing his thoughts, and regulating their conveyance, he contrived to keep the immediate object perpetually in view, and to take a fresh hold at every step on the minds of his hearers, who, if they were not absolutely convinced by his statements, were at least more than half persuaded by his sophistry. An instance of his art in drawing inferences for his purpose from circumstances which in themselves were perfectly neutral, and, properly considered, had no more to do with one side of the question than the other, appeared at the very outset of his oration on the summing up of the evidence. With great address he brought forward an account of some of the provinces of Hindostan that had been recently sent home by Lord Cornwallis, but which description, though melancholy enough in several particulars, could not by any fair inference be considered as a reflection upon the administration of Mr. Hastings. But what neither Lord Cornwallis nor the native princes had presumed to assert, Mr. Sheridan thought he might safely venture to deduce without fear of an immediate contradiction. The neglected condition of Oude in particular, upon which some remonstrances had passed from Lord Cornwallis to the Nabob Vizier, who excused himself by alleging his poverty for the neglect of his estates, afforded ample scope for the fertile imagination of the orator to make Mr. Hastings the primary source of the evil; though it must

naturally have suggested itself to every discerning mind, that if such was the case, complaints in full and explicit terms would have been made by those, who, feeling most, could have had no inducement to restrain them from crying loudly against the author of their wrongs. This silence in the east was a very satisfactory answer to the clamorous in England; but unfortunately the still voice of reason can seldom be heard when the passions of the people are acted upon by intriguing politicians, who know that appeals to the feelings are too seductive to fear much from the exercise of the judgment. Aware of this, Mr. Sheridan, with the address of a man well acquainted with human nature, placed his picture of India before his auditors, and thus prepared them to believe what he stated, that the whole was the immediate consequence of a series of oppressions committed by Mr. Hastings. The next artifice of the orator, in directing this part of the prosecution, was to account for the defectiveness of legal proof, by representing the witnesses as more or less interested in suppressing or colouring real facts; and to describe the very documents selected in support of the impeachment, as having been drawn up with caution by the parties whose study it was, though contrary to their duty, to conceal the iniquity of their proceedings, and to disguise the truth. In all this, one may now observe more of the ingenuity of the pleader, engaged in his official

character to support a cause without the smallest regard to its validity, than the confidence of a person standing forth as the advocate of injured rights upon public principles. By thus discrediting the witnesses for the prosecution, and undervaluing the written evidence, on the convenient plea that the former knew more than they chose to confess, and that the latter had been garbled and falsified to elude discovery, the manager was enabled to apologize for those deficiencies of testimony which he called difficulties, and to give a greater weight to that hypothetical reasoning, upon which alone he could rely for the support of his arguments and to substantiate his charges. The committee had unlimited power to call witnesses, and to demand papers; yet it is a truth that they had more prudence than to bring forward all who were waiting at their requisition, or to produce a tenth part of the ponderous mass of writings of which they obtained possession. Some gentlemen, whose evidence was regarded as of great importance, after waiting long in England, at the instance of the managers returned to India, because it did not suit the purpose of the accusers of Mr. Hastings to call them into court. The complaint, therefore, of defective evidence was a mere feint, though a well contrived one to cover the internal weakness of the cause, and to throw a greater degree of odium upon the whole system of our government in India.

With equal dexterity, but with the same sort of fallacy, Mr. Sheridan endeavoured to strengthen the prosecution by matter drawn from the several replies made by Mr. Hastings to the charges brought against him in the House of Commons. The defence which he had there produced was not now admitted on the trial; and in this he acted solely by the advice of his counsel, who were governed by the soundest principles of legal practice, for as the replication was in many particulars a justificatory plea, it could not have been allowed after the impeachment, without giving an undue advantage to the prosecutors. Mr. Hastings might very properly in the former place maintain the rectitude of his intentions, and the necessity of those actions which were alleged against him as crimes and misdemeanours; but it would have been highly improper to make the same plea before the Lords, which the Commons had discredited by their votes for the prosecution. In so doing, the obligation of proof would have been shifted from the accusers to the person charged with being guilty of enormous offences; and therefore, as he was now called upon to answer for the same, it was his duty, as well as that of his counsel, to abandon those explications and acknowledgments which, however just and satisfactory they might be, would only have served the purposes of the managers, by enabling them to give the whole an appearance of conscious guilt. That this would

have been the case had the counsel for Mr. Hastings acted with less discretion, is apparent from the taunting language used by Mr. Sheridan with regard to the different line of defence adopted at the bar of the Lords from that which was exhibited before the Commons. But the ingenuity displayed in the attempt to set up the evidence of the defendant against himself could make no impression upon persons slightly acquainted with judicial proceedings; and the labour manifest throughout the whole of the declamation on this subject plainly shewed that the orator was not satisfied with the conclusiveness of his own argument.

Having thus taken a much wider range, and of course occupied more time in the introduction than the magnitude and variety of the charges appear to have justified, Mr. Sheridan entered upon the allegations according to the order of the evidence.

His narrative was luminous, and his descriptions, particularly of the manners of the oriental women of elevated rank, were remarkably beautiful. He went into the family history of the Nabob of Oude with minute exactness, and depicted the supposed sufferings of the princesses in colours that overcame the feelings of his hearers. Mr. Hastings had justified his vigorous exaction of the debts due to the company at the period when these transactions happened by the critical circumstances in which the government of India was

then placed, and the extreme danger to which it was exposed. Upon this apology, the orator dilated with great eloquence, though amidst all his declamation the fact which justified the case remained untouched.

Mr. Sheridan allowed the plea of state necessity in many circumstances, instancing particularly the difficulty which would sometimes warrant a general or an admiral in departing from ordinary regulations and the customary practice of war. But this plea he could not concede to Mr. Hastings, though it was universally known that at the period when the occurrences took place, which formed the matter of the second charge, the safety of the British interests in the east depended upon prompt resolutions, and what may be called rigorous measures. Into these circumstances, however, neither Mr. Sheridan nor his colleagues chose to enter, being fully sensible that if they had, their accusations would have been dispelled like the mist before the sun.

The journey of Mr. Hastings into the interior to repress insurrection, and to secure the public revenues, was represented as having a very different object, and that of the worst description, being undertaken, according to Mr. Sheridan, for the purpose of gratifying avarice, and supporting usurpation.

In dwelling upon this part of the charge, full advantage was taken of the part performed by Sir

Elijah Impey, and of his evidence before the House of Commons and on the trial. Much stress was laid upon the account which Sir Elijah had given of his circuitous route to join Mr. Hastings at Lucknow; and here Mr. Sheridan indulged his sportive vein in a very lively and humorous manner. "This giddy chief-justice," said he, "disregards business. He wants to see the country. Like some innocent school-boy, he takes the primrose path, and amuses himself as he goes. He thinks not that his errand is on danger and death; and that his party of pleasure ends in loading others with irons."

The pleasantry of this digression, however, was nothing compared to the irony with which Sir Elijah's testimony was treated on the matter of the affidavits taken by him during this journey. It appeared that this extrajudicial proceeding of the magistrate resulted from a consideration of the probable service of these documents at some future period, on which account no particular use was made of them at the time. From these admissions on the part of Sir Elijah, deductions were drawn by the prolific hand of genius which he certainly never could have imagined himself, either in India or in England. "When at Lucknow, he never mentions the affidavits to the Nabob," observed Mr. Sheridan;—"no, he is too polite. He never talks of them to Mr. Hastings—out of politeness too. A master of ceremonies in

justice ! When examined at the bar, he said he imagined there must have been a sworn interpreter, from the looks of the manager ! How I looked, Heaven knows, exclaimed Mr. Sheridan, but such a physiognomist there is no escaping. He sees a sworn interpreter in my looks ! He sees the manner of taking an oath in my looks ! He sees the Basin and Ganges in my looks ! As for himself, he only looks at the tops and bottoms of affidavits ! In seven years, he takes care never to look at these swearings ; and then goes home one night and undoes the whole ; though when he has seen them, Sir Elijah seems to know less about them than when he has not."

The allusion to the Basin and the Ganges was by way of ridiculing Sir Elijah's account of the Hindoo mode of swearing, which is performed in the presence of a Bramin, who holds a brass basin containing water from the Ganges, into which the hand of the person to be sworn is immersed while he takes his oath. Such was the description given by Sir Elijah Impey of the Brahminical formula in the most serious of all human institutions : and hardly any person but Mr. Sheridan would ever have thought of giving a burlesque turn to so grave a subject. But the whole review of Sir Elijah's evidence was in a similar strain of travesty, ill-befitting the dignity of the court and the solemnity of the proceedings : for though some variations might have been detected, and

some circumstances have merited censure, jeering language was not calculated to convince the court, or to affect the witness. On the contrary, the air of ridicule with which this testimony was treated carried an appearance of weakness, for as there is rarely any logic in wit, it will generally be found that he who turns evidence into subject for banter virtually admits his inability to get rid of it by any other means.

It having been asserted that the country was in a disturbed condition at the period when the Begums were dispossessed of their estates, and that the active part taken by those princesses against the English justified that measure for the reduction of their power, the managers of the prosecution were obliged to shew that no insurrection of the kind had taken place; and that the disaffection of these women was unfounded. This part was undertaken by Mr. Sheridan, who touched upon it in his opening speech, which lasted four hours; but in the next, he resumed the subject at greater length, and treated it with equal energy and elegance. He placed the evidence that had been given by the several witnesses in the strongest light to vindicate the Begums from the accusation of having deported themselves in a way that could justly excite the suspicions of the English government, or warrant their relative the nabob in seizing their property.

In the course of this speech, Mr. Sheridan was very severe, not only upon the morality but the

judgment of Mr. Hastings, who, from the estimate here taken of his abilities, was a mere driveller in the science of government, and even a bungler in the art of deception. "Through the whole course of his conduct he seemed to have adhered to one general rule—to keep as clear as possible of the fact which he was to relate!—Observing this maxim, his only study was to lay a foundation as fanciful and as ornamental as possible; then, by a superadded mass of fallacies, the superstructure was soon complete, though by some radical defect it never failed to tumble on his own head: rising from these ruins, however, he was soon found rearing a similar edifice, but with a like effect. Delighting in difficulties, he disdained the plain and secure foundation of truth; he loved, on the contrary, to build on a precipice, and to encamp on a mine. Inured to falls, he felt not the danger; and frequent defeats had given him a hardihood without impressing a sense of danger."

This contumelious description of Mr. Hastings was followed by as extravagant a panegyric upon Mr. Burke, "to whom," said the orator, "I look up with homage, whose genius is commensurate to his philanthropy, whose memory will stretch itself beyond the fleeting objects of any little partial shuffling, through the whole range of human knowledge, and honourable aspirations after human good, as large as the system which forms life, as lasting as those objects which adorn it."

On the third day of summing up the evidence

Mr. Sheridan entered into a minute history of the resumption of the Jaghires, and the seizure of the treasures of the Begums by the nabob, who, by his account, was the mere creature of Mr. Hastings, and acted solely in obedience to his mandates. The whole of the business was represented as a dark conspiracy, of which the principals were the governor-general, who was the leader in that black affair, Mr. Middleton, the resident at Lucknow, and Sir Elijah Impey. While the manager was narrating the particulars of this transaction, and commenting thereon with his wonted acuteness and energy, he was taken suddenly ill, and obliged to retire from the court for relief in the open air. But after waiting some time, during which Mr. Adam read some papers to corroborate the statement that had been made, Mr. Fox informed their lordships that his honourable friend, though a little recovered, was yet too weak to proceed: in consequence of which, an adjournment took place to a future day.

On Friday, the thirteenth of June, Mr. Sheridan appeared in his place, completely renovated both in health and spirits, of which, indeed, he gave demonstrative proofs in his concluding observations on the evidence that had been adduced to support the allegations in the second charge. Here the powers of the orator were displayed to the greatest advantage, and language itself seemed too poor and contracted to furnish adequate ex-

pressions for the feelings of his own mind, and the sentiments which he wished to convey.

The picture exhibited of the sufferings of the aged princesses of Oude was wrought up with truly magical effect; and the emotion excited by this representation was heightened in contemplating their nearest relative as the reluctant instrument of perpetrating these oppressions at the stern command of the English governor, and under the superintendance of his agents. Here Mr. Sheridan had a fine field for the exercise of his genius; and he certainly laid no restraint upon his imagination, as the following passage sufficiently proves: "Oh FAITH! oh JUSTICE!" he exclaimed, "I conjure you by your sacred names to depart for a moment from this place, though it be your peculiar residence, nor hear your names profaned by such a sacrilegious combination as that which I am now compelled to repeat, where all the fair forms of nature and art, truth and peace, policy and honour, shrunk back aghast from the deleterious shade—where all existencies, nefarious and vile, had sway—where, amidst the black agents on one side, and Middleton with Impey on the other, the toughest bend, the most unfeeling shrink—the great figure of the piece, characteristic in his place, aloof and independent from the puny profligacy in his train, but far from idle and inactive, turning a malignant eye on all mischief that awaits him—the multiplied apparatus of

temporising expedients and intimidating instruments—now cringing on his prey, and fawning on his vengeance—now quickening the limping pace of craft, and forcing every stand that retiring nature can make in the heart—the attachments and decorums of life—each emotion of tenderness and honour, and all the distinctions of national characteristics, with a long catalogue of crimes and aggravations, beyond the reach of thought for human malignity to perpetrate, or human vengeance to punish—**LOWER than PERDITION, BLACKER than DESPAIR!**”

Here we may plainly perceive much of the beauty and much of the deformity of Burke's style of composition. There is a terrible grandeur in the imagery, but it is indistinct and confused, owing to that rapidity of thought which stops not to pause for the proper exercise of the judgment. Words are heaped together without discrimination; and the sentences are so vehement and disjointed as to render attention difficult; and the mind is hurried on in a labyrinth of unconnected objects and broken comparisons, till it is left all at once in a chaos, where it may grope in vain for any clue to comprehend the meaning of what has excited so much admiration. Of this famous speech we have only the report which was taken down by the short-hand writers, who were employed upon the trial, and therefore it is not easy to form an exact estimate of its entire merits. But

those passages which have been pointedly marked as pre-eminently distinguished for elegance and pathos, vigorous conception and luminous description, have not the same charm in the perusal as they had in their combined state, and aided by a happy delivery. Wonderful things indeed have been told of the effects of this piece of oratory in Westminster Hall; and if implicit credit were due to the opinion of Burke, nothing of the ancients ever came up to the eloquence of Sheridan. On their return from the trial to the House of Commons, that ingenious man thus took occasion to panegyrize the merits of his friend: "He has this day surprised the thousands who hung with rapture on his accents, by such an array of talents, such an exhibition of capacity, such a display of powers, as are unparalleled in the annals of oratory; a display that reflected the highest honour upon himself, lustre upon letters, renown upon parliament, and glory upon the country. Of all species of rhetoric, of every kind of eloquence, that has been witnessed or recorded, either in ancient or modern times; whatever the acuteness of the bar, the dignity of the senate, the solidity of the judgment seat, and the sacred morality of the pulpit, have hitherto furnished, nothing has surpassed, nothing has equalled what we have heard this day in Westminster Hall. No holy seer of religion, no sage, no statesman, no orator, no man of any description whatever, has

come up, in any one instance, to the pure sentiments of morality; or, in the other, to that variety of knowledge, force of imagination, propriety and vivacity of allusion, beauty and elegance of diction, strength and copiousness of style, pathos and sublimity of conception, to which we have this day listened with ardour and admiration. From poetry up to eloquence there is not a species of composition of which a complete and perfect specimen might not from that single speech be culled and selected."

It is lamentable to record the folly and weakness of genius; but when the interests of truth and wisdom are violated, and wantonly sacrificed at the shrine of human vanity, or to gratify the paltry objects of a party, silence would be no less contemptible than gentleness would be culpable. No person who heard this hyperbolical effusion could in reality believe that it was the offering of sincerity, or regard it as the expression of a sober judgment. The extravagant profusion of the incense evinced more design in the quarter from whence it came, than any conviction of its being deserved where it was so wantonly lavished. But Sheridan had so often in his speeches flattered Burke, that the latter could do no other than pay him some fine compliments in return; agreeable to what Sir Godfrey Kneller used to say, "one hand may wash the face, but two hands wash one another." It has been said by one of the most

inveterate enemies of Mr. Burke, that at the time when he pronounced this pompous eulogium his mind was corroded by the baneful poison of envy; and that while he exalted Sheridan beyond all "Grecian and all Roman fame," he hated him for the very talents which constituted the theme of his praise. Though the assertion of a professed libeller ought to be received with great caution, it is to be feared that this account is not altogether the offspring of inventive malice. The value of praise is to be estimated according to the disinterestedness and judgment of him who bestows it, and by an impartial consideration of the object to which it is applied.

Whatever might be the competency of Burke to appreciate the excellence of the performance of Sheridan, he was too much the enemy of the defendant, and naturally of too ardent a temper, to give his opinion with moderation. Where he censured, he was bitterly vindictive, and where he found it convenient to flatter, no epithets were too elevated. It has been said of Dryden that he invented a style of panegyric to which the appellation of celestial may be fitly appropriated. The same thing might be said of the encomiastic language of Burke, for the whole description is too inflated to be comprehended, and so exaggerated in all its parts as to excite astonishment at the accumulation of phrases rather than admiration of the object to which they were applied. It is in

short a catalogue of marvels which never met together in any human composition; and the superlative degree of extravagance with which the series of wonders rises till it is lost in the height of consummate perfection shocks even credulity, and turns the whole into ridicule. Had the oration of Sheridan deserved half this praise, much of its splendour would be found in the printed report; for though many brilliant passages and elegant allusions might escape the diligence or the memory of the writer who followed him, it is impossible that the substance should have eluded his skill at the time, or have been obliterated from his memory on the revision of his labour. But of the sublime morality, extensive knowledge, and elegant diction which Burke has celebrated with such fervent affection or artful contrivance, no adequate conception can be formed from the discourse as it now stands in the published record of this memorable trial. Here the reader seeks in vain for those beauties which the eulogium led him confidently to expect; and when he finds nothing more than an able review of evidence, a luminous statement of the particular case, with some strong observations on the conduct of the accused party, if he does not begin to suspect the integrity of the panegyrist, he will at least be disposed to censure severely the dulness of the reporter.

As the manuscript of this celebrated speech

is now in the possession of the family, having been lent by Mr. Sheridan to the late Duke of Norfolk, and returned to the author some years ago, the publication of it would enable the world to judge how far it deserved the applauses which it received; for though the immediate subject has ceased to interest, the composition itself may be instructive as a piece of eloquence.

The fourth of November this year, being the centenary of the Revolution, was observed throughout the kingdom in a very remarkable manner. In London, several popular societies assembled to celebrate the day with festivity, and among the rest, five hundred members of the Whig Club dined together at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, the Duke of Portland being in the chair. After the usual toasts, Mr. Sheridan delivered an eloquent speech, in which he drew the character of King William with great effect; and concluded by moving that a subscription should be entered into, for the erection of a pillar in Runnymede, to commemorate the origin of the English constitution and the establishment of our liberties. This proposition was so well received, that fifteen hundred pounds were immediately subscribed by the gentlemen present. At some other meetings, it was agreed that an application should be made to parliament for an act to set apart the sixteenth of December in perpetual remembrance of the Revolution, and the Bill of Rights which was passed on

that day. Accordingly, in the ensuing session, this measure was brought forward in the House of Commons and passed, but the bill was thrown out by the Lords. Mr. Sheridan displayed his wit upon this occasion with great freedom; and in reply to what had been observed respecting the imposition of new duties upon the clergy, he said, "With regard to the trouble the bill would give the parsons, when it was considered how essentially benefited the church had been by the Revolution, it surely could not be improper to oblige the ministers of it once a year to put themselves, as well as their congregations, in mind of that event from which the church had derived such very important advantages." Here the orator appeared to have forgotten that the established ritual has an office of thanksgiving for the same blessing; but what seemed most extraordinary, was the fact that this application for a new festival came from the dissenters, the avowed enemies to legislative interference in matters of religion; so true is the remark of the Roman satirist:

Numina vicinorum
Odit uterque locus; cum solos credit habendos
Esse Deos quos ipse colit.

END OF VOL. I.



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